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# LONDON CALLING

The wonder is that Margaret Thatcher's Britain took so long to blow apart. The rally and riot in London, the mass tax refusal in Scotland and now spreading through England, and the bloody prison revolt in Manchester come after a decade of imposed inequity, legislated injustice and institutionalized contempt of the rulers for the ruled. Thatcher's viciously regressive poll tax sparked the clash. Not since 1381, when England's last poll tax provoked the Peasants' Revolt, have the subjects of the scepter'd isle risen with such rage against their oppressors. With any luck, the Prime Minister will soon, like Shakespeare's Richard II, be ousted and consigned "to sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the death of kings."

The Establishment (much of the Labor opposition as well as the Tory government) identifies extremists, hooligans and "Marxists" as the violent vanguard of the current revolt, but it is a caste of its own creation. Thatcherism has marginalized millions of young people and beaten many more in the middle classes back into the ranks of the poor. By contrast, the wealth and privilege of the top layer of Britain's "two-tiered society" have been so enlarged that a vile climate of envy and hate grips the land. The prison population (the highest per capita in Western Europe) is exploding—hence the mayhem at Strangeways, Manchester's Dickensian relic.

There are chilling lessons here for the United States. Reaganism, after all, was a form of Thatcherism with a Hollywood gloss and some of the rough edges smoothed by federalism and chronic legislative paralysis. But even the Disney version produced similar results: inequality, criminality, poverty, homelessness, despair. Thatcher still rules and Reaganism, barely attenuated, still reigns. How long can they keep off the peasants at the gates?

**TEST IN LITHUANIA**
**Ronald Suny**

**PROGRESSIVE TAX ACTIVISM**
**Ann Withorn**

**JAMAL CASE**
**Kathy Deacon**

**LETTER FROM DEATH ROW**
**Mumia Abu-Jamal**

**AMIS'S LONDON**
**George Packer**

**PRESIDENTIAL GHOSTWRITER**
**Richard Lingeman**

CHINESE EXILE FRONT

# TRASHING THE HOPES OF TIANANMEN?

YUEN YING CHAN AND PETER KWONG

Last September, on the campus of the Sorbonne in Paris, leaders of China's exiled dissident movement gathered amid pomp and hoopla for the founding ceremony of the Front for Democratic China. The dignitaries in attendance included officials of the European Economic Community, representatives of major European political parties, envoys from Poland's Solidarity, even the movie star Yves Montand. However, barely six months after its founding, the front is rocked by scandals and dissension.

The media focus in Paris was on the exile leaders Wuer Kaixi (the 21-year-old student leader at Tiananmen Square who dared to lecture Prime Minister Li Peng on national television), Yan Jiaqi and Chen Yizhi (both top advisers to the deposed Communist Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang) and Wan Runnan (the millionaire computer entrepreneur of the Stone Corporation and a supporter of the student movement). All four had been targets of a massive government manhunt after the June 4 massacre, but they escaped on "underground railroads" to the West. Overseas Chinese saw the four as the rightful heirs of the martyrs of Tiananmen Square, and they were elected as the top officers of the front. There were urgent tasks to be performed abroad at a time when the people's voice inside China had been silenced, their rights trampled and information from the outside world cut off. The front, headed by these superstars, was seen as the one organization that could lead the divided pro-democracy movement.

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# LETTERS.

### OF THE DEVIL'S PARTY

*Arlington, Va.*

Richard Lingeman's review of *The Diary of H.L. Mencken*, "Prejudices: Last Series" [Feb. 19], states that notorious anti-Semite Gerald L.K. Smith was the founder of the America First Committee. Smith had nothing to do with the A.F.C., the most important isolationist organization before Pearl Harbor. In 1943 Smith founded the America First Party, an uninfluential extremist group entirely unrelated to the committee. Lingeman apparently relied on an erroneous footnote by *Diary* editor Charles Fecher.

*E. Scott Royce*

### THE BIGOT WITH THE BATH WATER

*New York City*

When I saw the editor of H.L. Mencken's *Diary* on a network morning show, it troubled me to hear him hemming and hawing to "put into context" Mencken's awful contempt for Jews: that he was, after all, a man of his time and class, that he publicly fought to defend Jews, etc., etc. I'm much more troubled to see your reviewer, one of *The Nation*'s own, characterize Mencken's even more contemptuous views about blacks as "'go-slow' conservatism." We shouldn't throw out the baby with the bath water, but let's not pretend that Mencken's bath water isn't very loathsome indeed. Writing about the dynamics that produced it would be valuable, but to dismiss it is wrong and dangerous.

I'm sorry to say that I know some brilliant contemporary writers, leftists included, whose private views about race are almost as repulsive and Neanderthal as Mencken's. They're not secret conservatives, they're bigots. Then or now, racism isn't O.K., even among us sophisticated intellectuals who work so hard to blah, blah. . . No matter how revered the mind that somehow assumes our permission to express it, it must be greeted with the same shock and condemnation we express eloquently about those who don't know better. Once we grant that permission, no matter how privately, no daring public statement or action on our part is anything but self-stroking.

*Sara Blackburn*

### LINGEMAN REPLIES

*New York City*

I most certainly didn't say that intellectuals have a special license to be racists. What concerned me about the press stories on Mencken's *Diary* was that they lumped him together with T.S. Eliot and Joseph Campbell. Of course it's proper to expose the private bigotry, if that's what it is, of intellectuals, and to analyze how their prejudices affected their work. My purpose was to take up Mencken as a separate case, which he is, and to supply some context. It is ahistorical to judge him solely on remarks in his diary, some of them more ambiguous than the journalistic exegetes recognized. I too remember being shocked when I first read the manuscript. Let's face it, Mencken wasn't always a *nice* man; prejudices were his literary stock in trade. (Let's also remind ourselves that his services to the cause of American literature were heroic, and that in the 1920s *The American Mercury* may have steered more young people to the left than *The New Masses*.) But on rereading the *Diary* and having read the extant biographies of him and published collections of his letters, it seemed to me that the matter wasn't black and white. Mencken himself *said* he wasn't anti-Semitic; he turned down anti-Semitic articles at the *Mercury*, opposed anti-Semites like Gerald L.K. Smith (I thank E. Scott Royce for his correction), didn't support Hitler, called for admitting European Jews to America in 1939, etc. I haven't read all the millions of words Mencken wrote in his lifetime, but as far as I know he never injected anti-Semitism into his public writings. As for blacks, "'go-slow' conservatism" can certainly be called constructive racism, but I'm not sure Mencken's views on the race problem were all that far to the right of the Roosevelt Administration's policies, and he did render a distinct service to blacks in his vociferous opposition to lynching.

What I wanted to do was to put Mencken's dirty laundry into a new spin cycle. I think the final answer to the question of his alleged bigotry requires more extensive biographical study. My hunch is that such a study would show that Mencken began to see, in the 1930s, where his prejudices could lead and that he backed off. I could be wrong.

*Richard Lingeman*

### ESOP QUIBBLES

*Oakland, Calif.*

Bartlett Naylor's article on employee stock ownership plans, "Not Just a Capitalist Tool" [Jan. 22], made some interesting points, but also contained some serious factual errors attributed to the National Center for Employee Ownership, which portray ESOPs in a very misleading way. Naylor writes that we estimated that 10,000 ESOPs covered 10 million employees at the end of 1988, which is true. But he goes on to say that "the vast majority of these employees owned only 1 or 2 percent of company stock." Naylor is confusing a kind of ESOP that no longer exists with the ESOPs we were counting. The old kind of ESOP, called a tax credit plan, did provide only very small amounts of ownership; the 10,000 we counted have a median ownership of 30 to 40 percent, and one-third own or will own a majority of the company's stock.

Naylor also suggests most ESOPs require employees to give up pension plans. Not true. Only 8 percent involve terminating pension plans, 3 percent require wage concessions and one-third involve a change in the profit-sharing plan (in these cases, however, the ESOP almost always replaces the profit-sharing plan at a much higher level of contribution). Nor is Naylor correct in suggesting companies use these mostly as a takeover defense. Only 4 percent of companies do this.

There are some serious abuses of ESOPs, particularly in some large public companies. Overall, however, the record of ESOPs is far more positive than Naylor suggests, as recent studies by the center indicate. True, ESOPs are not automatically equivalent to financial nirvana or corporate democracy, but of companies whose employees have either, ESOP companies are usually in the forefront.

*Corey Rosen*

### NAYLOR REPLIES

*Washington*

If the National Center for Employee Ownership's latest figures show that most ESOPs involve significant ownership by employees, then I say hooray! Rosen and his very capable organization are the prime source of valuable information on worker ownership.

At the same time, the N.C.E.O.'s figures show that in public companies at least, the ESOPs represented between 5 and 7 percent of total ownership. In addition, I fear Rosen may understate both some of the motives for the ESOP and some of the sacrifices unwilling employees may be forced to make in exchange for share ownership. First the motives: Companies may not be the target of a publicly announced hostile takeover when they adopt these ESOPs, but takeover fear may still play a key role. For example, raider Harold Simmons was officially a mere stock investor when Lockheed adopted its ESOP; given his track record, Lockheed had cause for alarm. Sure enough, a year after his initial investment, Simmons has increased the heat on the weapons maker and reportedly is seeking control.

As for worker benefits, while I didn't mean to suggest that ESOPs, on balance, were worse for employees than typical benefit plans, by Rosen's own count nearly half the companies he studied showed that worker pension plans were altered in some way. What's more, the N.C.E.O. review of all the major deals announced in 1989 may have overlooked some tacit wealth transfers from workers to the company. For example, Merrill Lynch terminated its pension plan and expanded its ESOP, and announced a $220 million after-tax profit because of this. The N.C.E.O. concluded that this change was a wash for employees. Aside from financial alchemy, however, it seems that this $220 million had to come from somewhere, and if it didn't come from taxpayers, then employee pensions may be a likely source.

My article dwelt on the problems of

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# EDITORIALS.

## False Start

Serious students of the history of nuclear arms "control" shouldn't be surprised to learn that the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks treaty the United States and the Soviet Union are now finalizing is a wholesale sham. For three years both sides have trumpeted their intention to cut strategic nuclear weapons stockpiles by 50 percent, promising a nervous world that for the first time an arms treaty between the superpowers would actually reduce arsenals, not just set limits on their growth. As R. Jeffrey Smith shows in the April 3 *Washington Post*, these claims should be taken with a grain of SALT.

A close reading of the emerging treaty reveals business as usual in the ersatz world of arms control. Cuts in older missile systems are traded for loose or nonexistent restrictions on a whole new generation of weapons including cruise missiles, "gravity bombs" and the B-2 bomber. No curbs are to be placed on the production of nuclear warheads. Nor is there anything currently in START that would prevent either country from recycling the old warheads from missiles that are to be destroyed. Worse, both sides have agreed to undercount vastly the number of weapons carried by strategic bombers. Aboard a B-1 or B-2, as many as twenty-two hydrogen bombs will be counted as a single weapon, bring-

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ing new meaning to the bumper sticker, "One nuclear weapon can ruin your whole day."

The only true reduction the START negotiations contemplate is in public questioning of the nuclear mandarins. As Secretary of State James Baker said last October, "Without the START negotiations, the domestic consensus needed to support essential modernization programs—not only mobile ICBMs, but also the B-2 bomber, the Trident, and our Strategic Defense Initiative—would be difficult to sustain. . . . Our force modernization and arms control efforts reinforce each other." Translation: The public and the press will leave us alone if we keep talking about big cuts, and then we'll be able to get Congress to buy all our new toys.

But while *The New York Times* recently reported that the peace movement is in decline due to the relaxation of East-West tensions, in some places activism is on the rise. More than 1,100 people were arrested at the Nevada Test Site near Las Vegas from March 31 to April 2. And in Soviet Kazakhstan, a new antinuclear group called Nevada (in solidarity with its American counterparts) has organized demonstrations of thousands at the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing grounds. Both groups, along with others in Britain and the two Germanys, are demanding an end to the testing and the production of nuclear weapons. Those two simple steps would make a better start toward ending the nuclear peril than any contemplated by the arms controllers.

# Crunch Crunch

For years on end, spectators have gazed in awe upon the ever-expanding bubble that formed over Japan. Land and stock prices reached pitches of the financial sublime never attained anywhere in the world, in total disregard of all conventional models of valuation. Until now, that is. Real estate prices stalled sometime in the past year or two. Stock prices have lost more than a quarter of their value since their all-time high. And the yen has become the weakest of the major currencies, a sign of capital shunning Japan.

So, is this the big one, the financial Chernobyl that doomsters have been waiting for? Doomsters have grown rather timorous ever since the crash of 1987 failed to lead to generalized ruin. Governments, it's hard to deny, have become quite adept at financial bailouts, dispensing assurance and subsidized credit in whatever doses are necessary to restrict financial crises to rather localized dramas. What makes Tokyo's problems of more than local interest is the possibility that the world's lender of last resort is running dry at a highly inopportune moment.

The world is in the early stages of what looks like a credit crunch. Back in the bad old regulated days, when the Federal Reserve tightened credit, banks would essentially run out of money to lend. Credit would dry up, a recession would ensue and inflation would cool—exactly the cascade of effects central bankers wanted to see. This mechanism was called a credit crunch. With deregulation, however, it seemed there would always be money available—at a price, of course, but available, even if it had to come from halfway around the world. It was thought that the deregulated system now lacked, in a word, "crunchiness."

Then came a series of credit disasters. The junk bond market began to live up to its name. Real estate across the country started slumping. States and cities started showing huge deficits. Promiscuous lenders—Drexel Burnham Lambert, much of the thrift industry—disappeared, and more respectable institutions began to rediscover the old-time credit religion. Bankers who had been pushing money out the door suddenly began to deny credit to all but their bluest-chip customers. A joke going around Wall Street imagines a simplified curriculum for loan officers of the future: "No."

And now perhaps the cruelest sound of all—crunchy noises emanating from Tokyo. Although conventional measures of inflation show no reason for alarm, the swelling of Japanese asset prices has been hurting the productive economy and promoting social tension. Land prices make it nearly impossible to set up a business or to find housing in Tokyo. Nouveaux riches have sprouted in what was previously one of the most egalitarian of the major capitalist powers, provoking a class resentment not seen in Japan for decades.

So the governor of the Bank of Japan, Yasushi Mieno, resolved to bring the land and stock markets down to earth, earning him unusual public criticism from a Deputy Minister of Finance, Makoto Utsumi. Such bickering always makes financial markets nervous, especially in Japan, home of the hitherto seamless consensus. But the politician in Utsumi knows that deflating a bubble is a very dangerous task, one that frequently claims innocent bystanders. These will probably include debtors around the world desperate to find a substitute for Japanese munificence.

For the first time in recent memory, it's getting harder to borrow—regardless of the price. The consequences of this for a world grown used to easy credit cannot be happy. At best, as no less an authority than Robin Leigh-Pemberton, governor of the Bank of England, argued recently, the industrial world is in for an era of high interest rates. At worst, the crunch will turn into a worldwide recession, one that will test the financial and political durability of an allegedly triumphant capitalism. DOUG HENWOOD

*Doug Henwood, editor of* Left Business Observer, *is writing a book on Wall Street for Verso.*

## MAXWELL S. STEWART

Maxwell S. Stewart, who died last month at the age of 89, was associate editor of *The Nation* from 1934 through 1947. A prolific writer on economic subjects, he was also editor of the Public Affairs Pamphlets and chairman of the Public Affairs Committee. At *The Nation*, he contributed numerous articles and editorials of consistent cogency and courage on the great issues of the 1930s and 1940s.

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# Test in Lithuania

In the David-versus-Goliath struggle between Mikhail Gorbachev and the democratically elected Lithuanian government, Western sympathies, especially in the news media, lie with the defiant Baltic republic. The spectacle of armored personnel carriers rolling through Vilnius, and the soft-spoken Lithuanian President, Vytautas Landsbergis, forced to back down has tarnished Gorbachev's image abroad.

Gorbachev's seeming intransigence, his refusal to negotiate with Lithuania as if it were a sovereign state, and the removal of journalists from Vilnius revive memories of the heavy-handed practices of the Brezhnev era. The Soviet President faces the hard choice of carrying on his democratic reforms or holding the Soviet Union together. Empire has come into conflict with democracy.

In Moscow, and apparently in Washington as well, the actions of Lithuania were considered unnecessarily hasty. The Kremlin called them "invalid" and "illegal"; the White House found them cause for concern and apprehension. President Bush shifts uneasily between sympathy for Lithuania and anxiety about Gorbachev's future. Gorbachev must consider the West's response, but it is secondary to the dangers of secession. He warned Lithuanians, "If the voice of reason is not heeded now, developments could have grave consequences for all of us."

Gorbachev confronted a similar crisis in Azerbaijan. For a time, when militant Muslim nationalists were tearing down border guard posts and rampaging through the streets of Baku killing Armenians, it appeared as if the Soviet state was dissolving before the television cameras. A second Afghanistan within the Soviet Union was predicted. After nearly a year of reluctance to use military force, following the April 9, 1989, killings of civilians in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, the Soviet Union demonstrated that it retained the muscle to act as the final arbitrator in ethnic clashes. The measured but forceful response of the Soviet military in Azerbaijan brought the most dangerous phase of the Caucasian crisis to an end. Although answers to the "nationality question" cannot be supplied by tanks and military occupation, at least time was gained for consolidating the central government's power and working out a new state treaty between Moscow and the non-Russian republics.

Gorbachev's dilemma is between the ends of democratization and the means to achieve it: Does the use of force against separatists halt progress toward democracy? Can the Soviet Union be turned from an empire in which one nationality dominates subordinate peoples into a genuinely democratic confederation of equal nations? Will Lenin's oft-stated goal of national self-determination (which included secession) continue to be treated as mere rhetoric, or can it be put into practice for the first time in seventy years?

Ironically, Gorbachev's vision of *perestroika* has helped unleash separatist demands. His cautious, phased revolution from above has from its beginning been dependent on support from social forces outside the ruling circles to prevent conservative apparatchiks from undermining his reforms. Most important, *glasnost* mobilized intellectuals to deconstruct the rhetorical facades that had propped up Brezhnevism. But in releasing the resentments and discontents festering in Soviet society Gorbachev may have misjudged the ability of a state that itself is in disarray to control a growing revolution from below. That revolution, which brought out striking miners, mobilized consumers incensed at privileged party potentates, and, most violently, gave voice to the suppressed hatreds of non-Russians (not to mention Russian nationalists), has shaken the foundations of the Soviet state and endangered the revolution from above. Democracy has stimulated separatist nationalism that will either break up the Soviet Union or lead to a brutal crackdown—and the end of *perestroika.*

Both in Azerbaijan and now in the Baltic region Gorbachev has made his choice: No republic shall be permitted to declare itself independent unilaterally. Such an action would mean that other republics—certainly Estonia, Latvia and Georgia—would soon follow. A permissive or indecisive policy from Moscow would encourage Azerbaijan, Moldavia and (most dangerous for the survival of the Soviet Union) the Ukraine to move toward independence. Not only would *perestroika* be sacrificed but so would Gorbachev's political survival.

Gorbachev's decision should have been expected—not because he is insincere about his democratic agenda, however he may define it, but because the minimal obligation of any leader is to prevent the disintegration of the state. If Gorbachev allows the Soviet Union to fly apart he won't be able to prevent a counterrevolution by the conservatives and the military within his governing coalition.

So far Gorbachev's policy of firmness with restraint has the overwhelming support of the Congress of People's Deputies. Determined both to prevent the breakup of the Soviet Union—at least along the Lithuanian path—and to reform relations between the center and the republics, Gorbachev has repeatedly made it clear that independence and sovereignty for the non-Russian nations is not precluded. The precise meaning of that independence, however—how it will be achieved, at what time, and what will be the final shape of a democratic relationship among the former parts of the empire—remains to be worked out. Already there is talk of permitting secession within five years, but a more likely scenario for most republics is full "independence" and "sovereignty" within a looser Soviet confederation—the broadest cultural, political and economic autonomy for the republics, but with foreign policy, military security and certain budgetary decisions retained by the center. If such a Soviet confederation preserves aspects of empire, it will not satisfy the non-Russian nationalists. But as the Soviet Union gropes toward creating a democratic state based on the rule of law, all its peoples must also begin to appreciate the virtues of compromise, so essential to a pluralist society.

RONALD SUNY

*Ronald Suny is Alex Manoogian Professor of Modern Armenian History at the University of Michigan.*

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# BEAT THE DEVIL.

## The Fiddler and the Woof

It's hard to read a newspaper without being reminded of that macabre urban legend about the fellow picking up his girlfriend at her penthouse apartment. She shouts from the bathroom for him to wait in the living room. Idly he throws a ball to her frisky dog. One last time he tosses it, a shade too strongly. It bounces through the balcony door and up over the railings, followed by the eager retriever.

You'd think that by now, after almost a decade, the press would have learned not to be fooled by Ronald Reagan. But no. He had only to toss the ball.

Take the former President's videotaped testimony in the trial of his National Security Adviser, John Poindexter. Reviews were pitiless. "Fumbling, halting, appearing befuddled," wrote Haynes Johnson in *The Washington Post* for March 23, "his eyes wary and almost haunted at times, his voice huskier and lower than one remembers, visibly older and defensive, he resembled the unflattering caricatures of him."

In *The New York Times* for the same day, R.W. Apple Jr. took a similar tack. "Stripped of his 3-by-5 note cards . . . the former President looked smaller, older, less sure of himself. His energy level seemed lower than ever. . . . His brow furrowed, his eyes moving from side to side, he seemed puzzled and sometimes more than a little lost."

What we actually had here was a smart old actor effortlessly bamboozling the lawyers and the newshounds. Remember that Reagan was in a tricky situation when he began that videotaped testimony. To nail Poindexter the Iran/*contra* prosecutors wanted Reagan to testify that the admiral had acted without presidential authority. But were he to do this—and open himself to the likely possibility of being asked about his subsequent approval or disapproval—Reagan would be conceding that he knew Poindexter had indeed done the things he was charged with. So Reagan took the entirely incredible course of testifying that he couldn't remember anything at all. As Murray Waas, the only writer I could find who accurately described Reagan's strategy, pointed out in a fine piece in *The Village Voice* for March 20, Reagan swore under oath he didn't know what Poindexter was doing at the time, and remained ignorant even after his own Tower commission had submitted its report to him.

So seized were Apple, Johnson and the others with their prose poems about Reagan's senility that they failed to note his utterly absurd claim that even now, in 1990, he did not know that proceeds from arms sales to Iran had been diverted to the *contras*. The entire nation knows that Reagan knew this, since he announced the diversion in his press conference of November 25, 1986.

With his beautiful cameo role as an Alzheimer President the wily Reagan did Poindexter an enormous favor and avoided all inconvenient questions (trenchantly posed by Waas) about his own likely perjury in October 1987 before the federal grand jury investigating the Iran/*contra* scandal. "The former President's rambling, inconsistent account lacked all drama," Apple concluded. "It seemed a mere footnote, an afterthought too old for today's politics, too new for tomorrow's history." Out the window sailed the ball, and after it plummeted the dogs.

## What Did They Do in the War, Daddy?

I support Lithuania's right to national self-determination. Its case is at least as strong as those that could be advanced by nationalists in Hawaii, Alaska or Mexico's stolen territory, Texas. People seem a bit vague about Lithuania's history all the same, imagining that it has been one nation, free (and most definitely under God) for centuries, governed from Vilnius. But Vilnius was once Vilna in Byelorussia, as the Byelorussians are now pointing out, and in my 1906 Century Atlas you can't find Lithuania, only a slab of terrain called West Russia, which is not surprising since Lithuania was absorbed into the czarist empire at the end of the eighteenth century.

If Eastern Europe is going to be recast in a prewar mold, we might as well have a clear idea of what the political architecture was like back then. As the *Workers Vanguard* and *The Guardian* have both pointed out, the interwar Lithuanian Republic was scarcely democratic, being a right-wing dictatorship under Antanas Smetona, who seized power in a coup in 1926. The feudal knight-and-horse coat of arms raised by the Sajudis movement this past March 12 was the symbol of that anti-Semitic regime.

The last time Lithuania declared independence was the day after Hitler invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. The slaughter of Jews that followed was mostly accomplished by Lithuanians, with the German *Einsatzkommandos* awed by the ferocity of their helpers. "In Lithuania," Christopher Simpson writes in *Blowback*, "municipal killing squads employing Lithuanian Nazi collaborators eliminated 46,692 Jews in fewer than three months, according to their own reports, mainly by combining clocklike liquidation of 500 Jews per day in the capital city of Vilnius with mobile 'cleanup' sweeps through the surrounding countryside."

These days such horrors are often left tactfully unmentioned, not least because, as I noted here two weeks ago, U.S. covert policy at the dawn of the cold war was to rescue some of the killers and set them to work, rousing the captive nations against the Soviet yoke.

This process of re-Nazification was the subject of *Blowback*, and I was reminded of the reception, back in 1988, of this excellent book when I read a recent article by Serge Schmemann, a *New York Times* correspondent now working in the Germanys. Writing on the day of the East German elections, he asked, What next for the East German psyche? "There are potent arguments that the road to finding their footing lies with East Germans' confronting the past under Communism and under Nazism, an era that the leaders of East Germany have previously dismissed as something for which Communists bore no responsibility."

The way I read this, Schmemann is saying that the Communists, in some unspecified way, did bear responsibility for the Nazi era. Now, East German party chief Honecker,

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ALEXANDER COCKBURN

whatever his later sins, did spend ten years in a Nazi concentration camp, and after the war the East Germans did make energetic efforts at de-Nazification. For example, no one who had been a Nazi Party member was permitted to be a teacher; the industrial property of "war criminals, National Socialists and militarists" was expropriated.

All this was in marked contrast to West Germany, which Schmemann implied did successfully purge itself of its Nazi past. It did, but mostly by closing its eyes. The technocratic elite that administered the Nazi state and supervised its crimes—the use of slave labor and the death camps, the theft of Jewish, Polish and Czechoslovak property—went on administering the West German economy. The preservation of capitalism in West Germany meant the forgiving of most of those who had been responsible for the Nazis.

While East Germany was firing its Nazi teachers, men like Otmar von Verschuer were gliding back to respectability. Verschuer headed the genetics and anthropology faculty at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Berlin during the war. He encouraged Mengele to conduct medical experiments in Auschwitz, and Mengele remitted blood and organs to Verschuer's institute. Verschuer took refuge in the American zone and ultimately sailed serenely into dignified status as the dean of West German genetics, teaching at the University of Münster.

As with Verschuer, so with the sociologists who, under S.S. supervision, prepared the demographic briefs that helped the death squads identify their targets as the Nazis marched east. Many of these sociologists went on with their work in West Germany after the war. Others were hired in the operations run by George Kennan and his associates in the U.S. State Department. Which brings me back to Schmemann.

It is a fundamental thesis of Simpson's *Blowback* that when the United States embarked on its postwar strategy of rollback, seeking to overthrow the Soviet state and its satellites, it derived the personnel and the tactics for this endeavor from what it perceived to be the best qualified source: the Germans responsible for conducting the war on the eastern front. It was the U.S. government that gave old Nazis the cover of anti-Communism. Schmemann reviewed *Blowback* in *The New York Times Book Review* for May 8, 1988, and took particular issue with Simpson's thesis, saying it was "patently unfair," having "the effect of smearing anti-Communism with the taint of Nazism." In fact, as noted above, Simpson was charging the U.S. government with engineering this conjunction.

It is a pity that Schmemann did not take the opportunity to disclose his own interest in the topic under review. His father, Alexander Schmemann, was born in Estonia in 1921, grew up in France and was ordained as a Russian Orthodox priest in Paris in 1946. In 1951 he moved to the United States to teach at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary in Crestwood, New York, of which he became dean in 1962.

For thirty years Father Schmemann broadcast a Russian-language Sunday sermon on the C.I.A.'s Radio Liberty, commanding a large audience among Orthodox followers in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Father Schmemann was also deeply involved in coaxing into existence the Orthodox Church in America (O.C.A.), which was granted independent status by the Moscow Patriarchate in 1970.

The establishment of the Orthodox Church in America was a brilliant achievement in ecclesiastical diplomacy, and the Reverend Schmemann dexterously accumulated allies in his campaign. Among them was Bishop Valerian Trifa of the Romanian Orthodox Church. At the time Trifa was locked in a struggle with his rival in exile, Bishop Andrei Moldovan, who espoused a more détentist approach to the Orthodox Church back in Romania. As battle raged between Trifa and Moldovan, the former's opponents circulated damning stories about Trifa's role in the anti-Semitic pogrom in Romania in 1941, when he denounced Jews as "serpents" who should be "killed in their lairs." His opponents indicated that Trifa's views had not changed in exile.

Schmemann and Trifa forged a most productive religio-political alliance. Trifa supported Schmemann in his coalition-building toward the establishment of the O.C.A., and Schmemann's seminary trained Trifa's priests and placed them in parishes previously loyal to Moldovan. Trifa's priests made up about 20 to 25 percent of the students at the seminary, which Trifa helped financially, and Schmemann's church confirmed Trifa's own disputed rank as bishop and became "protector" of Trifa's faction. Trifa's appointment to the O.C.A.'s governing board was engineered as part of that alliance, as was his subsequent representation of that body on the National Council of Churches and World Council of Churches. Thus dignified in large part at Schmemann's instigation, Trifa acquired the clout necessary to consolidate control of the assets of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the United States, which might have passed under the control of Bishop Moldovan and other rivals.

Trifa's dark past was no secret by the end of the 1960s, but the O.C.A. denounced Trifa's enemies as Communists and stood firm as Trifa's most prominent defender. Serge Schmemann was then a youth leader in his father's church organization, and indeed co-editor of the Church Education Commission journal, *Concern* (whose files have proved impossible to obtain). Trifa remained on the church's board and did so even after he had fled to Spain in 1984, prompted by the U.S. Justice Department's announcement, sustained by a federal court decision, of its plan to deport him.

So it might have been helpful if Schmemann had mentioned that his own father had spent thirty years as a major figure in operations that were the subject of the book he was reviewing. But that's history, as George Bush would say. Who cares about the roots of the Sajudis movement in Lithuania. History is a movable feast, as is depressingly illustrated in the *Gannett Center Journal* that lies before me as I write. It features one of the most famous photographs in the world, Robert Capa's "Death in Action," taken during the Spanish Civil War. In the *Journal* it is captioned "D-Day landing, Normandy, June 6, 1944." Ronald Reagan would have understood.

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# BELTWAY BANDITS.

DAVID CORN

## ■ At Least He Died Free

Two days after U.S. troops invaded Panama, Luis Riaño, a 27-year-old Panamanian, and his wife, Grettel, drove to the Paitilla Airport in Panama City. Riaño ran a small aviation radio business there in an office that had been temporarily expropriated by members of the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division. As Riaño and his wife entered the airport grounds, the Army opened fire. At least thirty rounds hit their car. Grettel somehow survived; Luis was killed. "He was destroyed," says John Kiyonaga. "He was blown into hamburger."

Only four months ago Kiyonaga was an Army lawyer assigned to the Tenth Special Forces Group. Now with his brother David, an attorney who used to live in Panama, Kiyonaga is representing more than 100 Panamanian civilian victims of the invasion or relatives of those who were killed. Luis Riaño's family is among their clients.

The Kiyonaga brothers have been making the rounds of official Washington, equipped with grisly photographs and sad stories, in an effort to win support for damage payments from the United States to their clients and others. The $470 million Panamanian aid bill in Congress contains no funds for such damages, and under the Foreign Claims Act the military is not liable for combat-related injury. Such claims were paid, however, in the aftermath of the 1983 Grenada invasion, with money from the U.S. Agency for International Development. That cost the United States $1.86 million; the Kiyonagas, who are working on a contingency basis, are asking for about $25 million. (Their estimates: 202 dead—the official and questionable U.S. Army count—at a median of $50,000 each, and 2,000 injured at a median of $20,000 each, the total amount then halved in deference to "political realities.") The Army told the Kiyonagas to knock elsewhere, and no one in Congress or any federal agency has yet embraced their cause.

It's not that the Army has no heart. The Army informed the Kiyonagas that it will pay for the $2,500 or so in phone calls made to the United States by the Army soldiers who "liberated" Riaño's office.

## ■ Deficits Begin at Home

The Bush Administration's scorn for citizens of troubled nations extends far beyond the dead and injured of Panama. A lawsuit recently filed by several unions and human rights groups charges that President Bush, U.S. Trade Representative Carla Hills, Secretary of State James Baker and other Cabinet members involved in trade policy have callously disregarded a law that requires the United States to monitor worker rights in developing nations. Under the act only countries that recognize certain labor rights—such as the right to organize—are eligible to export goods to the United States duty free. It is the task of the President to determine if a nation meets this standard, a task that has been largely avoided by the Bush and Reagan Administrations, though the latter in 1987 did manage to terminate the duty-free status of Nicaragua, which was already the subject of a trade embargo. Neither Bush nor Reagan conducted systematic reviews, so trade benefits have been extended to a number of countries that persistently violate worker rights in the most serious way. Two such countries are Malaysia and the Philippines, and herein lies a clue to the White House's reluctance to adhere to the law.

In Malaysia, the number one producer of computer chips in the world, workers in the electronics industry toil in miserable conditions and are forbidden to organize [see Denis MacShane, "Dreaming of the Forty-Hour Week," May 15, 1989]. Many of them labor in the factories of U.S. companies, such as Hewlett-Packard and Texas Instruments. These U.S.-based multinationals, after taking advantage of low-cost labor, export the goods to the United States and receive preferential trade treatment. Some deal. In the Philippines, workers organized at a Mattel factory in 1988. The maker of Barbie then shut down the plant, in January 1989, and several months later opened a new one, in Malaysia.

Those who wring their hands over the trade deficit need not look all the way to the East to find the culpable. Many inhabit the corporate board rooms at home. It is not surprising that Bush et al. have failed to enforce the worker rights provisions or that the federal government has released no statistics on the portion of the trade deficit attributable to imports from U.S. multinationals.

## ■ With Friends of the Earth Like These . . .

For Earth Day some of the same corporations that brought you dirty air, polluted water and toxic dump sites are getting into the spirit. Recently several leading despoilers of the environment gathered on the Mall in Washington for what they slyly called EarthTech 90. Their fair, supposedly a celebration of environmentally sound products and technologies, did spotlight some innovative alternative energy firms, but it also included the following:

§ Waste Management, the largest publicly held company in the waste business. The E.P.A. is currently seeking a $4.5 million fine from one of its affiliates for improperly burning hazardous waste.

§ Du Pont, the world's largest producer of ozone-depleting chlorofluorocarbons. Although Du Pont agreed to phase out CFC production, it is currently pushing a substitute that will also damage the ozone layer.

§ Ciba-Geigy, a major creator of Superfund sites. It was indicted in 1985 on thirty-five counts connected to illegal dumping in its landfill in Toms River, New Jersey, and in the Atlantic Ocean. For more than two decades the Toms River plant has piped toxic waste directly into the ocean.

§ Browning Ferris Industries, the top competitor of Waste Management. In March, B.F.I. and its affiliates were fined $1.55 million for 1,400 hazardous waste disposal violations at a Louisiana facility.

Others that leaped on the EarthTech bandwagon were such environmental stalwarts as the Department of Energy, Westinghouse, the Chemical Manufacturers Association and the Society of the Plastics Industry. Beware the eco-hypocrites.

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# ARTICLES.

PROGRESSIVE TAX ACTIVISM

# Taxation for the General Good

ANN WITHORN

Although Americans traditionally grouse about taxes, poll after poll shows that millions of them are willing to put up with higher taxes to help house the homeless, fight drugs, improve education, clean up the environment and tackle many other problems. That impulse is now being mobilized in at least a dozen states, producing fledgling movements that just possibly could make the stodgy old issue of tax reform the basis for radical mass action in the 1990s.

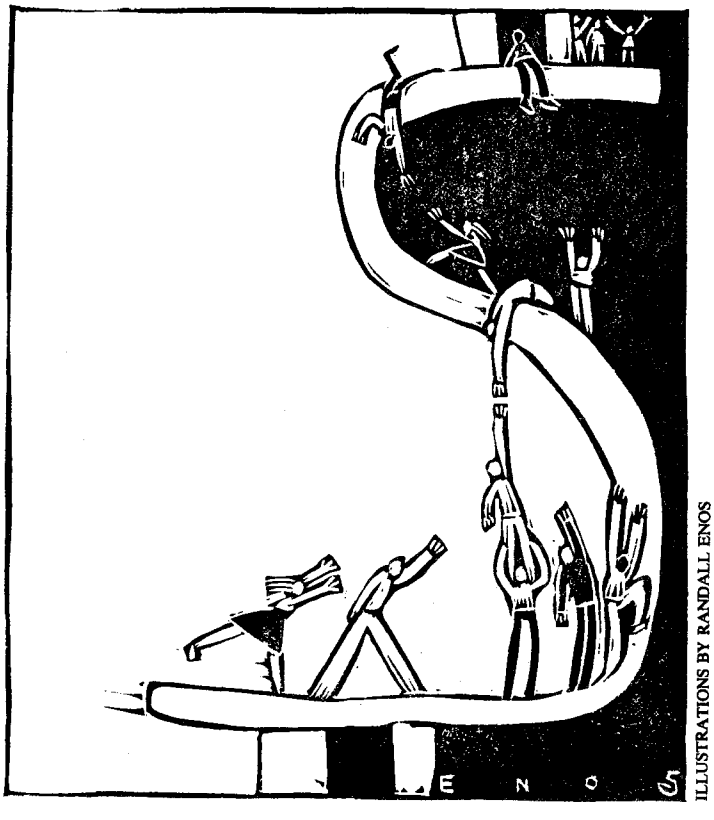
In few places is this more apparent than in Massachusetts. In the wake of Governor Michael Dukakis's presidential rout in 1988, the Bay State has endured a deepening political and economic crisis. Revenue has dropped 1.8 percent, the greatest decrease since at least 1959, and the state's bond rating is now the lowest in the country. An angry legislature blames the lame-duck Governor for budget shortfalls and repeatedly rejects tax packages from all directions. By now Dukakis can offer only balanced budget proposals coupled with dire warnings of the disaster these stingy outlays will bring. Meanwhile, the few legislators who favor new or increased taxes retreat before threats from vociferous antitax constituents.

Several interrelated causes for the mess are widely discussed in the news media, all reports starting with recognition that Dukakis's precipitate decline has created a crisis of leadership. But much of the problem stems from the cumulative effect of Reaganism's federal cuts and reduced benefit levels. Massachusetts prospered during the 1980s and chose to maintain the precuts level of many federal programs even as Congressional tax-code changes decreased revenue flowing into the state. Massachusetts coffers were further drained by increases in aid that were used to buffer the effects of 1980's Proposition 2½, a conservative-sponsored local property tax–cap initiative. Still another reason for the present revenue shortfall was the decision to repeal a ten-year-old surtax on the state income tax—a move made in 1986 in hopes that it would banish the state's "Taxachusetts" image before Dukakis ran for the White House.

By late 1988, when the state's surging economy began to decline, Dukakis and the legislature were left holding an empty bag. "Massachusetts is currently doing the job of three governments," says Jim Braude, director of Tax Equity Alliance for Massachusetts (TEAM). "We are paying for many programs previously funded by the feds, and for local services that cannot be supported because of Proposition 2½; and we are still responsible for the normal state services."

Like similar organizations around the country, TEAM argues that citizens deserve government services, and that the inequitable tax base from which revenues are raised is the major contributor to the current fiscal crisis—in Massachusetts as well as in other states. Founded in 1987, TEAM is a coalition of progressive tax reformers—ranging from the Boston Rainbow to public-sector unions to the League of Women Voters—that demands restructured taxes to finance a more responsive government. The organization has proposed a ballot initiative for November's gubernatorial election that calls for a $400 million "Invest in Massachusetts' Future Fund." The money would be earmarked for human services and education and come from increased capital gains taxes and the creation of a tax on business services such as architecture and accounting. The proposition would also require that corporations disclose their state tax payments, create a bipartisan Task Force on Ethics and Efficiency to track government waste, and offer tax relief to the elderly and families that pay for child care.

While organizing the initiative, TEAM continues to lobby for a range of revenue packages, since recent economic developments have made the state's budget deficit—now more than $750 million—far greater than predicted. TEAM's principal aim, however, is not to solve the present budget disaster but to galvanize a sustained grass-roots movement for fair taxes and democratic services. And the organization



ILLUSTRATIONS BY RANDALL ENOS

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is off to a good start. Last fall's effort to place the initiative on the ballot generated widespread attention and succeeded in collecting 140,000 signatures, 90,000 more than needed.

Significantly, the TEAM effort gathered 5,000 more signatures than Citizens for Limited Taxation (C.L.T.), the powerful antitax group that put across Proposition 2½ ten years ago and is mounting another initiative for November. C.L.T.'s position, articulated by Barbara Anderson, its combative director, is that taxpayers already are providing plenty of money to run the state efficiently. Supported by the powerful High Technology Council, she argues that the Governor and legislature have a political, not an economic, problem, and that they could solve it by cutting waste instead of basic services. Since they refuse, she says, voters must limit the available revenue and enforce "responsible government." The C.L.T. initiative would roll back recently increased state agency fees and the temporary flat-rate income tax increase passed last summer (to make up for 1988 shortfalls), as well as wipe out any new taxes approved before the November election. C.L.T. claims that, if passed, its initiative would save $1 billion—by following the classic right-wing populist agenda of cutting taxes, cutting spending and cutting government.

Inevitably, C.L.T. has strong allies in the news media, including Jerry Williams, Boston's most popular radio talk-show host, and two columnists for Rupert Murdoch's *Boston Herald*. One of them, Don Feder, is a founder of C.L.T. Many in the business community, however, privately express fear that the new C.L.T. initiative would bankrupt the state. Richard Manley, head of the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation, a mainstream business-oriented good-government body, is very nervous about it, and James Sullivan, president of the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, has said publicly that he thinks passage of the C.L.T. initiative would be "disastrous" for the state's economy. Despite these anxieties, only a few of the state's business leaders are willing to support publicly any increased taxes, afraid—as Sullivan puts it—to back what they are certain is a losing cause. And none support progressive tax-reform measures.

A half-dozen major candidates have so far entered the race for governor, and only one—Lieutenant Governor Evelyn Murphy—argues for new taxes. Not surprisingly, none of the candidates favor the TEAM initiative. But, as the TEAM bulletin says, "the coalition is now a movement—and we won't go away." Indeed, the TEAM/C.L.T. matchup may be the most exciting and important aspect of the coming election, and some feel the battle could well spark a "pro-democracy movement" in Massachusetts.

Is it reasonable to expect tax reform to transform itself into a grass-roots movement at all, much less into an American-style pro-democracy movement? I posed this question to tax activists currently seeking progressive tax reform in general, and specifically the rollback of a New York State business tax cut and a change in California property tax rules. They were cautiously optimistic. But each identified critical barriers and strategic imperatives to be considered before many on the left become, in Braude's phrase, "born-again tax reformers."

Traditionally, tax reform has been the domain of middle-class professionals. The complexity of tax law discourages mass organizing tactics, while the self-proclaimed expertise of tax reformers may offend grass-roots activists. Michael Reisch, a longtime tax reform advocate who directs the social work education department at San Francisco State University, recalls a tax effort in Maryland where "initial meetings drew big crowds for tax justice. Then we decided that everybody needed training to understand taxes. Within three months we were back to [depending on] the old crowd of policy advocates."

Yet TEAM's Braude argues forcefully that tax policy is not so complicated: "It is simpler than welfare policy, and lots of people feel comfortable making radical, popular demands about that." Tax veterans agree that talking simply, not simplistically, can work because, as Richard Kirsch of Citizen Action of New York argues, "at heart people understand that everyone should pay their fair share of taxes, especially if they believe the money will be well spent."

Talking taxes, of course, inevitably means talking about the welfare state. Prior Massachusetts tax campaigns frustrated some activists because it sometimes seemed as if the organizers (mainly white and male) cared only about the taxes themselves, while demands to fight cuts or create better programs were secondary. But in recent months, because of the magnitude of the Massachusetts crisis and TEAM's broader vision, there has been little tension. If anything, the need to fund services now seems to drive the demands for fair taxes.

This reflects the perspective of all the tax advocates I interviewed. Bill Zimmerman, political director of Voter Revolt in California, expressed the consensus when he said that "building a base for fair taxes means re-establishing the connection between taxes and services. The right has made people forget the equation. We have to remind people of what they need from government and then show how tax justice is the only fair way to pay for it."

One way to reassert this relationship is to fight for taxes that have a particular purpose. Activists have traditionally opposed earmarking, like TEAM's Invest in Massachusetts' Future Fund, because it often favored broad, mainstream programs over those specifically targeted at poor people and minority communities. But today's tax advocates now insist that earmarking makes sense in any attempt to create a base for more democratic, accountable government. It builds upon what the polls consistently show: that citizens want to provide decent services, but that they also (reasonably) do not trust present-day governments to do so effectively on their own.

Popular feeling that capitalism cannot be easily shaped by traditional government reforms must be addressed if the fight for equitable taxation is to have more than its traditional liberal, middle-class base. But, as experience has taught tax advocates, you can't just say "soak the rich." It's simply not a strategy that will work in the United States,

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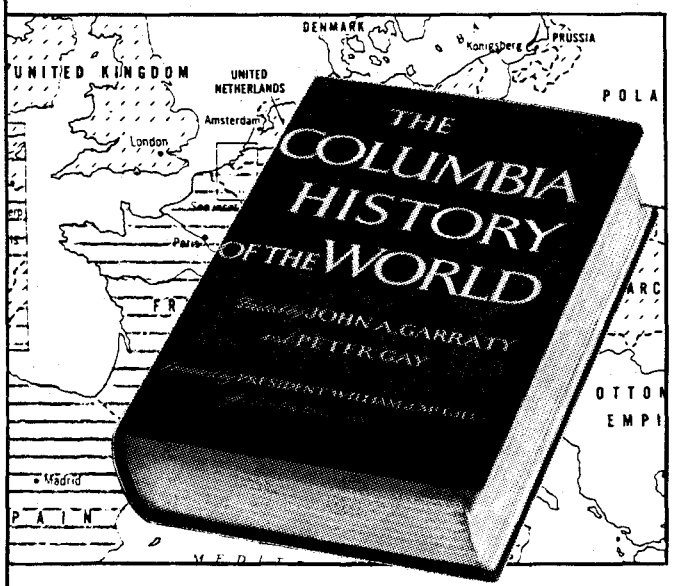


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where most people hope to get rich one day. Moreover, the C.L.T. line that it is risky to tax businesses because they will pick up their swivel chairs and move—or raise prices—has a certain appeal. But Fred Newdom, a tax advocate who runs ProAct Consultants in Albany, New York, points out that studies show "the major influence on corporate location is where the C.E.O. wants to live and the quality of the services available to employees, not taxes." Other analyses demonstrate how poor state and local services hurt business competitiveness far more than direct taxes, which can be anticipated and managed. Reformers seek to raise popular expectations that corporations can be controlled, just as they try to rebuild hope that a truly democratic government can serve the people.

Here TEAM's emerging "movement-building" strategy of raising more radical expectations becomes critical. Braude argues that the success of TEAM depends on talking to people one-on-one through "Home TEAMs" that are currently being organized to form local coalitions for fair taxes and against the C.L.T. ballot initiative. "Slick media campaigns will not be enough, although we will have to do that. If we want not just votes but something that lasts, we need to go to the people with positive organizing that builds deep understanding," he says.

Will the typical fractiousness of coalition politics defeat the movement? Most tax coalitions like TEAM are made up of a wide spectrum of human service professionals, "citizen advocates" and labor union members—especially public-sector unions. Progressive elected officials are often involved, either openly or behind the scenes. Leadership is usually white, although the New York coalition has been strongly supported by black and Latino groups in New York City. People speak proudly of the loyalty of their diverse constituencies. "Groups who don't agree with each other about anything else have stuck together on this issue," boasts Braude.

In the past, tax advocates have perhaps glibly accepted the "structural problem" of lack of involvement by poor people's groups and by minority communities. "Tax reform is just not going to be an immediate issue for folks worried about survival," one veteran reformer said. But Braude counters that tax reform proponents, including TEAM, have not always done their homework: "When we go to the minority communities, they are with us, strongly, because they absolutely understand the issue. But to include them, connections have to be made at the leadership and organizing levels, and we have yet to do that effectively."

Similarly, if tax militancy does lead to a broader social movement, some professional advocates may fear losing control of the "policy agenda." Last October, after a rousing demonstration in Boston of 20,000 students protesting cuts in higher education, most organizers were ecstatic. TEAM, in fact, collected 2,000 signatures for its ballot petition. Still, one person worried that the students had not been disciplined enough, that they "should have had c.d. [civil disobedience] training." As always, coalitions that generate grass-roots militancy must be prepared to support, or at least work with, the groundswell from below—even when the enthusiasm for change does not follow predictable paths or established leadership.

How successful the progressive tax movements in Massachusetts and elsewhere will become is not yet clear. As is all too true of left strategies in general, how they ultimately play out may depend more on the continuing crisis of state capitalism than on organizing efforts alone. And there is also a real danger that leadership's isolation from minorities, women and those with nonprofessional styles will weaken pro-tax movements. But if the disparate groups that would benefit from meaningful tax reform *do* manage to pull together in the 1990s, the possibility of curbing corporate America would become a reality. This is worth fighting hard for, since it clearly would expand the social wage and broaden our definition of democracy. □

PENNSYLVANIA JUSTICE

# The Killing of Mumia Abu-Jamal

KATHY DEACON

Law is literature, and this includes death penalty litigation. So malleable, so subject to the bias and imagination of those who interpret it, the law is being read in Pennsylvania to send Mumia Abu-Jamal to the electric chair. On February 2 the Pennsylvania Supreme Court denied Jamal's petition to reargue his appeal upon conviction of killing a police officer. In doing so it left two institutional forces standing between the black journalist and execution: the U.S. Supreme Court and the state's Governor. It also did something else. By disregarding its own precedent and standards of what constitutes a fair trial, the state's Supreme Court reinscribed a message to every black and every political radical in Pennsylvania: Legal rights assumed as guarantees can vanish as soon as you try to assert them.

Jamal, who had no previous police record, was sentenced to death in 1982 for the shooting of a Philadelphia cop six months earlier. At the time of the incident Jamal, 27, was a prominent radio journalist in the city and president of the local chapter of the Association of Black Journalists. His radio interviews, some of which had been broadcast nationally on NPR and other networks, presented the points of view of blacks, Puerto Ricans, the elderly, the poor and other minority groups. *Philadelphia Magazine* named him among the "81 people to watch in 1981."

For his work Jamal became "controversial," particularly following the 1978 police attack on the MOVE organization's commune in Powelton Village, in which a police officer was shot dead. Nine MOVE members were tried collectively and

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each was sentenced to thirty to one hundred years in prison, although there was no evidence linking any one person to the shooting. Jamal covered the trial for WUHY and was later discharged by the station for not being objective. Eventually he came to identify with the group, wearing his hair in dreadlocks, as its members did, and quoting John Africa, the founder of the group.

MOVE, with its cultlike aspect and anarchist politics, was a far cry from the Black Panther Party, which had nourished Jamal politically from an early age. As a youth growing up in the North Philadelphia ghetto, Jamal tried to organize student support for the Panthers. He became an editor of the party's newspaper, and in 1970, at the height of the F.B.I.'s lethal Cointelpro operation against the organization, the 16-year-old Jamal served as the Philadelphia chapter's lieutenant of information. This association with the Panthers was to be persistently exploited in his prosecution twelve years later.

Let us review briefly the facts of Jamal's case which the Pennsylvania Supreme Court had before it.

The events of 4 A.M. on December 9, 1981, remain sketchy in their detail. According to witnesses, Jamal, who had been moonlighting as a cabdriver, emerged from a parking lot to see his brother struggling with a police officer who had stopped him for making a wrong turn onto a one-way street. Jamal rushed to defend his brother, and a shootout ensued. The officer was killed.

Jamal was slumped on the curb and near death himself when police backup arrived. He says he was beaten on the scene, kept from the hospital for forty-five minutes and beaten again at the hospital. He required two and a half hours of surgery to remove a bullet that had perforated his liver and lodged in his back.

Police evidence notwithstanding, the events of December 9 invite speculation about possible sequences and scenarios; a review of the trial court proceedings, however, allows for no such range of interpretation.

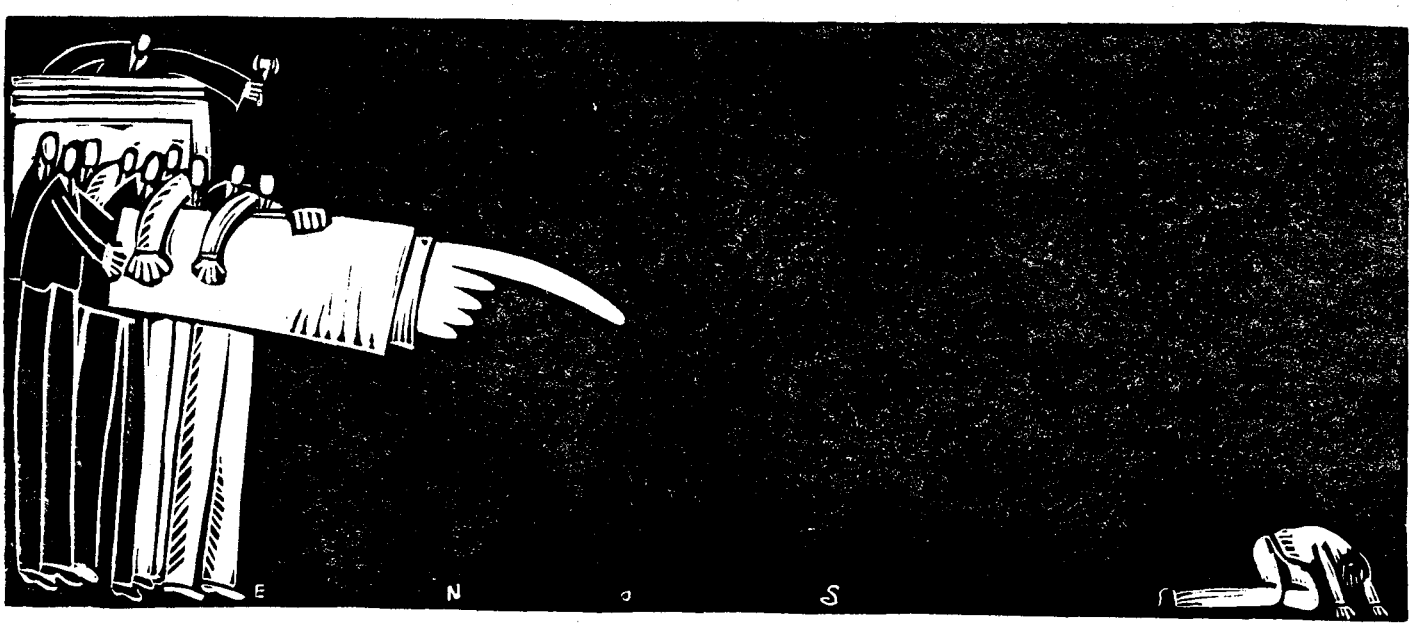
In a city almost 40 percent black, there was only one black among the jurors who tried Jamal and sentenced him to death. The jury was composed predominantly of middle-aged, lower-middle-class whites drawn from the Formica kitchens of Greater Northeast Philadelphia, where most neighborhoods are entirely white and "Black Panther" might be seen as a synonym for "terrorist."

The trial judge, Albert Sabo (known as "the hanging judge of Pennsylvania" for his unmatched record of death penalty convictions), accepted the prosecutor's peremptory challenges against eleven black jurors but denied the defense a challenge for cause against a white juror who repeatedly insisted he was biased against Jamal.

Jamal was initially permitted to represent himself, his right under the law, but as jury selection got under way, the judge took over the questioning of prospective jurors and forced Jamal to accept a court-appointed attorney. Jamal was denied the investigative resources necessary to locate witnesses and the opportunity to serve subpoenas once the trial had begun.

At one point in the trial the prosecutor seized upon the fact that a character witness for the defense, the poet and Temple University professor Sonia Sanchez, had written the foreword to a book by Assata Shakur (*a k a* Joanne Chesimard), a fugitive convicted of killing a policeman. Sanchez was questioned about her relationship to men who had been convicted of killing police and whom she said she had never heard of. Judge Sabo remarked that Sanchez "seems to get involved with people that were police killers," allowing the inference to be drawn that she might have befriended Jamal because he too was a cop killer.

Throughout the trial the prosecutor attempted to introduce Jamal's former Panther membership into the proceedings. Again and again, the defense counsel objected and Sabo upheld the objection. Perhaps he recognized that such information in front of that jury was prejudicial, and was unwilling to risk a retrial on that basis. Sabo, however, exerted no such restraint during the sentencing hearing. While Jamal was addressing the jury in his closing plea, Sabo allowed the prosecutor to interrupt and cross-examine Jamal on his membership in the Black Panther Party and on



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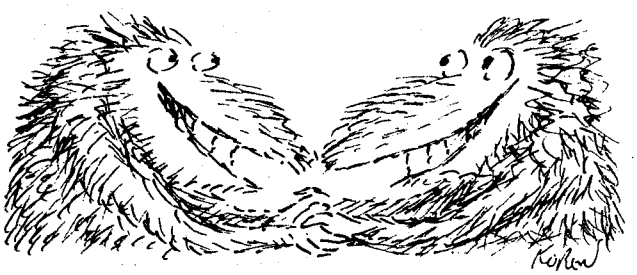

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Maoist views he had expressed in an interview with *The Philadelphia Inquirer* when he was 16.

In its astonishing opinion, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court held that the prosecutor's inflammatory line of questioning did not violate Jamal's First Amendment rights of free speech and association, his right to a fair trial or his common-law right to address the jury. The court said that allowing the jury to use its perception of Jamal's political views in passing sentence was not the same as punishing him for those views.

Pennsylvania's death penalty statute compels a jury to sentence a defendant to death when it finds a statutory aggravating circumstance, such as killing a police officer, that is not outweighed by a mitigating circumstance. The law actually prescribes some mitigating circumstances for a jury to weigh. Additionally, the jury may consider any others—in Jamal's case, for instance, the fact that he had no previous offenses. But at Jamal's sentencing hearing, Sabo never defined "mitigating circumstance" in his instructions to the jury. Jamal pointed this out in a brief to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, arguing that his right of due process had been violated, but the court rejected it.

In his summation at sentencing, the prosecutor told the jury, "You are not asked to kill anybody." He said that the last person executed in Pennsylvania was Elmo Smith in 1962 and that Jamal would have "appeal after appeal." This suggested to the jury that a death sentence would probably not translate into reality and that ultimate responsibility for the imposition of death rested with a reviewing court. In *Commonwealth v. Baker* the Pennsylvania Supreme Court reversed a death sentence because of the use of nearly identical language by the same prosecutor at a sentencing procedure presided over by the same judge. In Jamal's case the court dismissed its own precedent. (On the subject of precedent it is also important to note that Jamal's case was never reviewed by a majority of the Supreme Court; in a highly unusual move Chief Judge Robert Nix heard the appeal argument but then did not participate in the court's decision.)

Now, his appeals nearly exhausted, Mumia Abu-Jamal waits on death row at Huntingdon prison. [See accompanying article.] He refuses to cut his dreadlocks, so for the past two years he has been in "disciplinary confinement," which means no television, no radio, no telephone calls to his family, no commissary privileges and no books, except for legal and religious literature. For twenty-two hours a day he is confined to a tiny cell; the other two hours he spends outside in a roofed enclosure known as the "dog pen." There is the constant noise, the screaming of mentally disturbed prisoners and, since the uprising last fall, the threat of being zapped with a stun gun by guards.

Jamal nevertheless continues to write, sending regular dispatches on legal issues and prison life to the *Philadelphia Tribune*, the *Atlanta Inquirer* and other newspapers. He has defenders among activists and in the black community, but others are reluctant to take up his cause because of his association with MOVE, which is unpopular with many Philadelphia blacks. The Partisan Defense Committee, an organization associated with the Spartacist League, has

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mounted a high-level campaign in his behalf, attracting an array of supporters such as Maggie Kuhn, Ron Dellums, Percy Sutton, Howard Fast, Ramsey Clark and Ed Asner.

It would be wrong to see Jamal's case as a total aberration, justice in this country being a highly subjective instrument, especially in cases complicated by race and politics. But the extent of legal errors willfully overlooked here suggests that justice didn't even make an appearance in Judge Sabo's courtroom. The Governor of Pennsylvania, Robert Casey (Main Capital Building, Room 225, Harrisburg, PA 17120), can grant clemency to Jamal at any time now. He should do so immediately. □

LETTER FROM DEATH ROW

# B-Block Days And Nightmares

MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

*For whence did Dante take the materials of his hell but from our actual world? And yet he made a very proper hell of it.*
*—Schopenhauer, "Homo Homini Lupus"*

A shove, a slur, a flurry of punches, and an inmate is cuffed and hustled to the R.H.U. (Restricted Housing Unit), where a beating commences. Wrapped in the sweet, false escape of dreams, I hear the unmistakable sounds of meat being beaten by blackjack, of bootfalls, yells, curses; and it merges into the mind's movie-making machine, evoking distant memories of some of the Philadelphia Police Department's greatest hits—on me.

"Get off that man, you fat, greasy, racist, redneck pig bitch muthafucka!"

My tired eyes snap open; the cracks, thuds, "oofs!" come in all too clear. Damn. No dream.

Anger simmers at this abrupt intrusion into one of life's last pleasures on B-Block—"home" of the state's largest death row—the all-too-brief respite of dreams.

Another dawn, another beating on B-Block, another shackled inmate at Pennsylvania's Huntingdon prison pummeled into the concrete by a squadron of guards.

This was late October 1989, the opening for furious days and nights when prisoners throughout the state slipped briefly free and erupted in rage. The scene had been replayed a thousand gruesome times, and the conflict it prompted, crushed ultimately by club and boot, by fire hose and taser electric stun gun, began with the modest demand that Huntingdon's administrators put an end to beatings of handcuffed prisoners in B-Block. Since then the repressive practice has not abated and the bitter aura over America, as politicians cry for "toughness," descends over already darkened dungeons like a pall.

As walls fall in riotous clamor in the Eastern bloc, and as demonstrators rejoice over an end to state police brutality, walls climb ever higher in the West, and club-wielding fists find frequent function in subduing the common urge to human dignity, whether by imprisoned or "free."

Prisons in America jeer at the rhetoric of liberty espoused by those who now applaud Eastern Europe's *glasnost*, for capital's elite guardian, the U.S. Supreme Court, has welded prison doors shut, blacked out and shuttered windows, closing off any "opening," any notion of the rights of free press, religion or civil rights. (See *Shabazz v. O'Lone* and *Thornburgh v. Abbott* for examples.) Indeed, in the late 1980s the term "prisoners' rights" became oxymoronic.

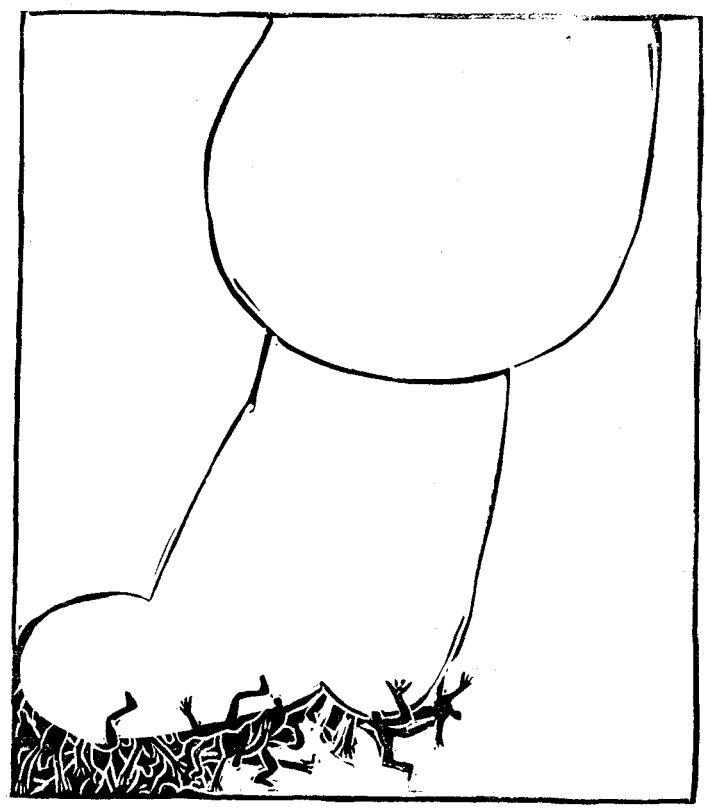
The riots that rocked Pennsylvania were flickering reminders of this reality: acts not of aggression but of desperation, of men pushed beyond fear, beyond reason, by the clang!—not only of prison gates but of the slamming of doors to the courthouse, gates of legal recourse chained.

At Huntingdon's A-Block, fistfights between guard and prisoner evolved into a full-scale riot.

"Walk, you fuckin' nigger! I'm not gonna carry your black ass!"

"You black nigger motherfucker!" yelled a rural voice, the fight exploding onto B-Block in a dark, red wall of sound. Grunts, thuds, groans and curses assailed the ear as a bloody promenade of cuffed prisoners, many of them the A-Block rebels, were dragged, flogged and flayed, down the dirty gray corridors of B-Block's death row en route to outdoor cages, man-sized dog pens of chain-link fence.

"Officer," a visiting guard barked to a Huntingdon regular, "stop dragging that man!"



*Mumia Abu-Jamal is on death row in the State Correctional Institute at Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. His writing appears in the* Philadelphia Tribune *and other newspapers.*

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"Captain," the local guard answered, her voice pitched higher by rage, "this fuckin' nigger don't wanna walk!"

The prisoners were herded into the cages—most bloody, some in underwear, many wet, all exposed to the night air for hours.

Days later Camp Hill in central Pennsylvania erupted, with prisoners taking hostages, assaulting some and putting much of the forty-eight-year-old facility to the torch. For two nights the state's most overcrowded prison stole the public's attention. It took a battery of guards and state troopers to wrest back some semblance of control.

"Say 'I'm a nigger!' Say it!!" the baton-wielders taunted black prisoners, beating those who refused, according to MOVE political prisoner and eyewitness Chuck Africa, who, although not a participant in the rebellion, was nonetheless beaten by guards, transferred into the federal prison system and lodged at Lompoc Prison, California.

Days after the fires of Camp Hill cooled, while convicts stood shackled together in the soot-covered yard, Philadelphia's Holmesburg burst into its worst riot in almost twenty years. At its peak prisoners yelled, "Camp Hill! Camp Hill!"

Now, as costs for "Camp Hell's" reconstruction soar (latest estimate, $21 million), and bills are introduced to cover county costs for riot prosecutions (to the tune of $1.25 million), one must question the predictably conventional wisdom attributing the days and nights of rage to simple overcrowding. To be sure, the system's "jam and cram" policy was a factor, but only one among many.

In 1987 the Governor's Interdepartmental Task Force on Corrections, composed of eight Cabinet-level secretaries, issued a comprehensive report calling for changes in the state's prisons: reform of the misconduct system, institution of earned (known as "good") time, liberalization of visiting procedures, release of death row prisoners from the R.H.U. and introduction of substantial education programs. The report, despite its pedigree, died a pauper's death, its biggest promises unfulfilled.

The naming of David Owens Jr. as prison commissioner in 1987, the first black in the top post, may have heightened expectations, especially among blacks, who make up 56 percent of the prison population, but it also deepened frustrations as prisoners saw no change in rule by predominantly rural whites over predominantly urban Afros and Latinos. Was it mere coincidence that rebellion burned hottest at Camp Hill, within sight of the commissioner's office?

Owens's tenure proved as short-lived as it was historic. Politicians protested when he proposed nominal compensation for prisoners who lost their property in the state's shakedown after the riots. Mindful of looming gubernatorial elections and of politicians angling to make Owens and the prisons an issue, Pennsylvania's first-term socially conservative Governor, Robert Casey, accepted Owens's resignation. With the state's captive population breaking 21,000, prisons overcrowded by 50 percent and more than 700 convicts in the federal system, it's not surprising that there are now no takers for Owens's politically sensitive job.

Perhaps there is a certain symmetry in the circumstance of a prison system in crisis in the very state where the world's first true penitentiary arose, under Quaker influence. Two hundred years after initiation of this grim experiment, it is clear that it has failed.

One state representative, criticized by her colleagues for making "irresponsible" statements, boldly told United Press International the simple hidden truth: Unless serious change is forthcoming, she predicted, "we are going to continue to have riots."

Repression is not change; it's the same old stuff. □

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# Tiananmen

(*Continued From Front Cover*)

"We had great hope in these leaders and were ready to be led," recalls a Chinese graduate student in political science at Columbia University.

But the front's troubles began even before its founding meeting, when its leaders were accused by pro-democracy activists of handpicking delegates and excluding grass-roots activists who had begun building the pro-democracy movement outside China long before Tiananmen captured the world's attention. The leaders defended this "selectiveness" on the ground that building a small elite leadership group was more necessary than establishing a mass membership organization. Critics like Chen Jun (an activist who initiated a petition campaign in China last April to free dissident Wei Jingsheng) believe, however, that "the front's leaders do not trust people outside their own circle over whom they have no control." One group that felt particularly slighted was from Columbia University, an active center of the Chinese student movement for many years. "We met to prepare for Paris, submitting suggestions on the draft program and nominating delegates. But we never heard from them," complains Tang Yi-ming, a doctoral candidate at Columbia.

The front's leaders also railroaded their platform through the opening conference without discussion, even though grave reservations were expressed, especially about the bylaws, which place most of the organization's power in the hands of the secretary general, who has control over all finance and personnel matters. Because of its undemocratic nature, some Chinese students liken the front to the Chinese Communist Party.

Last October reports began to surface in U.S. Chinese-language newspapers about Wuer Kaixi, vice-chairman of the front, accusing him of pursuing an extravagant life style

*Yuen Ying Chan is a freelance writer living in New York City. Peter Kwong teaches politics at the State University of New York, College at Old Westbury.*

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and misusing funds. Wuer had spent more than $30,000 setting up his Boston office and apparently had nothing to show for it. Those charges prompted an audit by the front's board of supervisors, which revealed that in less than three months the organization had used up most of the $560,000 received from donations on air fares, luxury hotel accommodations, banquets and other questionable expenses.

Many student supporters were furious. "This is totally unconscionable," said Paul Chang, a student at the City College of New York. "They have not produced one publication, one radio program or anything else for that matter, yet half a million dollars is already gone. Do they know Chinatown restaurant and garment workers save up their hard-earned money just to help us?"

But embarrassing scandals continued to surface. Last December Hu Ming, an aide to Wan Runnan, the front's

# Taipei Square

Some 6,000 pro-democracy students wearing white headbands sat in the square, requesting an audience with top government officials. When they got no response, sixty-one of them went on a hunger strike, while thousands of citizens gathered around in support of their actions. This was not a scene from Tiananmen Square last spring; it happened last month in the square in front of Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall in Taipei, the capital of Taiwan. The students' demands were: an end to the government's emergency powers, the dissolution of the National Assembly, direct presidential election and the convening of a national affairs conference to discuss a restructuring of the government.

The demonstration occurred during the eighth session of the National Assembly. This session was to choose a president and a vice president, with only one candidate for each post—both of them nominated by the K.M.T. In elections that the K.M.T. was widely accused of rigging, members of the assembly were first selected in Nanking in 1947, as civil war raged—2,841 of them in all, representing the whole of China.

Once the Nationalist government retreated to Taiwan, membership in the assembly became for life. Today delegates are paid $4,000 a month just to meet every six years. In the past forty-three years few members have been replaced, mostly by alternates elected in 1947. At present the average age of the assembly is well over 80. Some come to vote held up by nurses, others in wheelchairs. On more than one occasion in the past, delegates have even arrived by ambulance, with intravenous tubes attached. This time one elder statesman, the 89-year-old Koo Cheng-Kong, one-time president of the World Anti-Communist League, turned up to vote for Chiang Ching-kuo (Chiang Kai-shek's son), only to be told by his subordinates that this was not possible, since Chiang had passed away: He should vote instead for Lee Teng-hui. Koo had never heard of Lee Teng-hui, the current President of Taiwan and the sole candidate in this election.

The K.M.T. has made sure of retaining control of the National Assembly by allowing the number of representatives to dwindle to 752 (about a quarter of its original size) so as not to risk adding new, younger elements. An overwhelming majority of members still represent mainland provinces. Taiwan itself, seat of the Nationalist government, is treated as just one more province, and is hardly represented. Thus, the Democratic Progressive Party, which won more than 30 percent of the vote last year in Taiwan's first open local and legislative elections in forty years, has only eleven seats. Outer Mongolia (now the People's Republic of Mongolia) has six, despite the fact that the Nationalist government renounced its claim to the territory in 1945, as a result of the Yalta Conference.

Before the last assembly session the K.M.T. held a plenary session to select the party's presidential candidates. The elders expressed concern about their declining influence since the end of martial law in 1987 and the beginning of multiparty elections. Even though the largely mainland-born conservatives still command the army, the police and the intelligence apparatus, they mistrust Lee Teng-hui, who is a native Taiwanese (a concession made after Chiang Ching-kuo's death in 1988). They complain that Lee is soft on Communism and not resolute in his drive to regain the mainland. During the party session they brought forth Chiang Wei-kuo, Chiang Kai-shek's younger son, who is known as a playboy with no particular talents, to run as a vice-presidential candidate. This action split the party wide open. Chiang eventually withdrew, but the sorry state of the party was apparent. Eventually, on March 21, Lee Teng-hui won the presidency with 96 percent of the assembly's votes.

The students' demonstration in March came as a direct response to these electoral shenanigans. The events surrounding their protest were remarkably similar to those in mainland China last spring. The only missing character was an equivalent of Li Peng, someone to call in the army to crush the students. But in the end, having considered what had happened in Tiananmen Square, taken note of the wave of democratic movements sweeping the world and understood the power of the opposition in Taiwan—which has grown significantly despite forty years of harsh repression—the Taiwan government relented. Lee Teng-hui met with the students on March 22 and promised reform, and the students ended their five-day sit-in. It was a victory for the democratic opposition, who hope this may be the last nail in the coffin for those who dream of a return to the Chiang dynasty. P.K.

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secretary general, admitted under persistent questioning by overseas Chinese students that last May, even before the formation of the front, when he traveled from the United States to Beijing to deliver $5,000 in cash donations to the Tiananmen students, he had forged the signatures of three student leaders who were supposed to have signed for the money. Shortly after Hu's admission, Yan Jianli, a front board member from Berkeley who had been to China on a similar mission, admitted failing to deliver $1,000 to the Tiananmen students.

This past January the front's leaders seized on an invitation from Taiwan to visit its anti-Communist enclave as a reprieve from all the negative press and ill will. Besides, the trip gave them a chance to replenish their coffers, since contributions from Chinese-American communities had virtually dried up after the exposés of financial wrongdoing. Hong Kong, another major funding source, was under strong pressure from Beijing to cease "supporting subversive activities," while the U.S. public had shifted its attention to developments in Eastern Europe and South Africa.

After the Tiananmen massacre, Taiwan's ruling Nationalist Party (K.M.T.) kept a low profile concerning the Chinese pro-democracy movement for fear of inciting the opposition under its own roof—martial law was lifted in Taiwan only in 1987, after thirty-eight years. But the chance of winning over the 40,000 mainland students studying in the United States was too good an opportunity to miss. Last September the K.M.T. dispatched Ma Shu-Li, its former secretary general, on a whirlwind tour of U.S. cities to set up mechanisms for dispensing funds to "pro-democracy" Chinese students. A major conduit was set up in the "Grand Alliance to Unite China under the Three People's Principles (Nationalism, Democracy and People's Livelihood)," which boasts an initial endowment of $3 million.

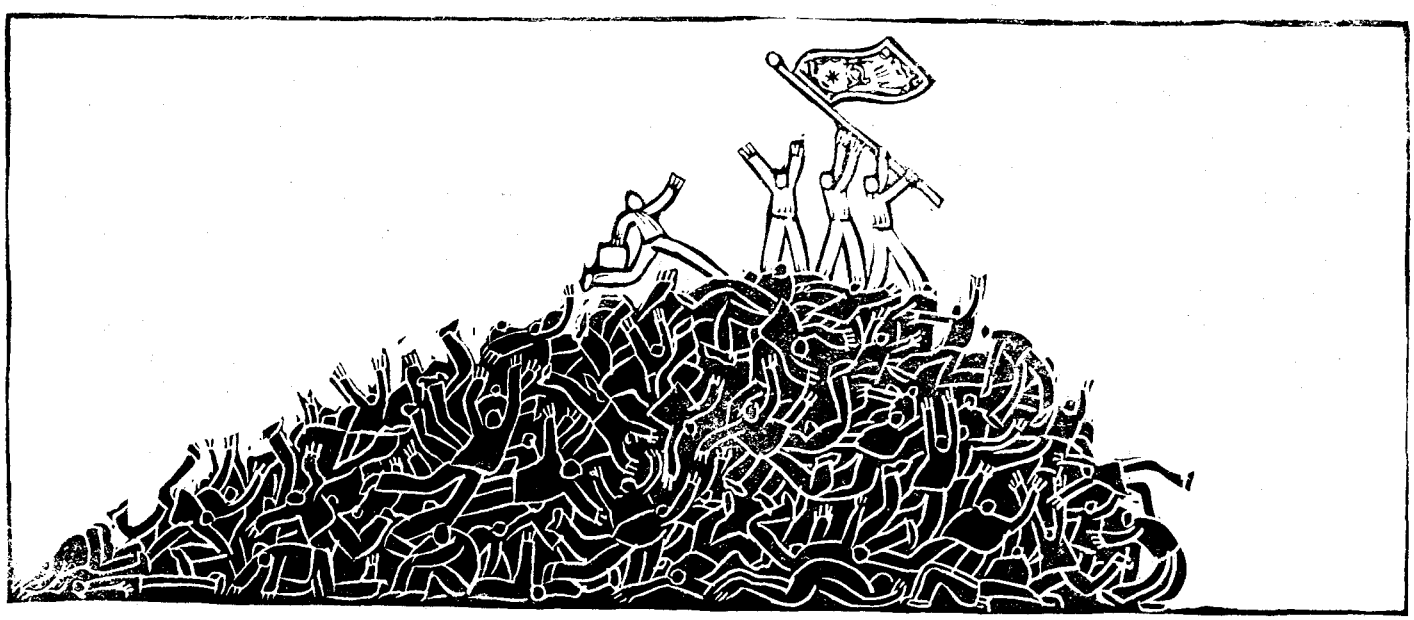
Along with the front's leaders, about fifty mainland students, writers and dissident leaders were invited to Taiwan, where they were wined and dined at the expense of "nongovernmental" organizations. These groups, however, turn out to have close ties to the K.M.T. They include *The United Daily News*, the top-selling Taiwan newspaper, whose views reflect the official K.M.T. line; the Chengchih ("Politics") University, a training school for Taiwan's political elite; and a number of anti-Communist organizations.

Wan Runnan and other exile leaders were paraded as heroes in *The United Daily News*. In return, Wan heaped praise on the K.M.T.'s "democratic experiment" and its economic miracle. By the time the visit was over, the front had received at least $153,000 in direct grants. It also received a commitment from *The United Daily News* to finance the publication of a magazine to be based in Paris.

According to Meng Hsuen, *The United Daily News* correspondent in New York who was instrumental in arranging the visits, "It is now public knowledge that all major pro-democracy groups receive most of their funds from Taiwan." Meng calculated that about $3 million a year would be sufficient to support all the major groups—"pocket change" for Taiwan, whose foreign reserves ($74 billion strong) are now the second largest in the world, just behind Japan's. All that the K.M.T. expects in return for its generosity is the propaganda value against Communist China—for which the students are much more effective than the Taiwan government could ever be—and the incidental boost to Taiwan's own image as a shining example of freedom and democracy.

Taiwan's own opposition was unimpressed, and most independent papers gave scant coverage to the fanfare. One prominent dissident writer suggested in his column that the mainland friends might want to visit Taiwan's own gulag, Lutao, a tiny island off the coast where political prisoners are still held. In an encounter between the front and Taiwan's opposition, Chang Fu-Chung, an official of the Taiwan Democratic Progressive Party who had spent four years in a K.M.T. political prison, asked if the front would "issue a solidarity statement on February 28 to commemorate the thousands of native Taiwanese killed in a massacre by the K.M.T. some forty years ago." Chang's suggestion was met with silence.

During a recent visit to New York, Chang gave his party's



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perspective on the Tiananmen massacre and the front: "Our party does support the pro-democracy movement in China, but we have the K.M.T. over us—we cannot help but look at it differently. We feel that the K.M.T. is using Tiananmen for its own political purposes." So if the Chinese exiles expect the majority of the Taiwanese people to support them, they must, Chang contends, "address the concerns of the Taiwanese people. Otherwise they are simply the puppets of the K.M.T."

Instead, the front's leaders lauded the accomplishments of the K.M.T. and its deceased leader, Chiang Ching-kuo, for bringing about economic prosperity and a multiparty system and rarely credited the Taiwanese people for their struggle to win these rights.

The front's economic program calls in general terms for the "development of a market economy." Its preference for capitalism is more openly stated in a speech given by Wan Runnan at the City University of New York: "A simple solution to China's problem is privatization of properties, thus enabling a middle class in China to emerge." Ideologically, the front has shown its preference for the particular brand of capitalism practiced in Taiwan. In fact, Taiwan was the explicit model of development for several of the front's leaders when they were reform-minded officials in mainland China. Reformers like Chen Yizhi, a former close adviser to Zhao Ziyang and now a founding member of the front, had promoted, even before June 4, the concept of a "new authoritarianism" [see Anita Chan and Jonathan Unger, "It's a Whole New Class Struggle," January 22], which argues that a "free" economy can be achieved only through the guidance of an enlightened autocrat who maintains order and keeps competing interests in line—K.M.T. leadership in Taiwan being a classic example. Taiwan, one of Asia's Four Little Dragons (along with South Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong), has achieved economic prosperity without political democracy (see sidebar on page 562).

Today, of course, none of the exiled leaders would openly come out in support of this new authoritarian model. The front's program speaks of bringing about a democratic China and an "end to the dictatorial rule of the one-party system." Still, its commitment to a genuine multiparty democracy is ambiguous. Front chairman Yan Jiaqi speculates that the first two stages of change in China would be the ouster of the Li Peng clique and the "rehabilitation" of all those denounced as "counterrevolutionaries" in the June 4 uprising. Critics accuse Yan of continuing to place hope in inner-party struggles, expecting these struggles to unseat the conservative Li and restore power to Zhao. With events changing quickly around the world, the front's leaders are gaining greater exposure to different political options, and they are re-evaluating their own positions. But Taiwan is pushing the front to adopt its own rigid slogan of "Down with the Chinese Communist Party."

The conciliatory attitude of the front's leaders toward the established powers has to be understood in terms of the traditional role of Chinese intellectuals, who throughout China's long imperial history served merely as administrators for the empire. Their role was to appeal to the wisdom of the ruler, not to challenge or overthrow him. Under the Chinese Communists, whose control of society is even tighter, intellectuals have little room for free thought and independent action. Their concept of change is to side with the "enlightened" faction within the party. Or, as Professor Andrew Nathan of Columbia University describes it, they "cast themselves . . . as loyal followers, appealing to the authorities to live up to the values the authorities themselves had articulated."

With this kind of tradition, the exiled leaders lack any experience of setting up a democratic organization. And their understanding of democracy is "primitive, and not much beyond Locke," in the words of a Chinese research scientist at Harvard University. The front has failed to win the allegiance of the pro-democracy movement, which is now splintered into dozens of groups. Aside from the front, there are the seven-year-old Chinese Alliance for Democracy, the Association of Chinese Students and Scholars, the Chinese Freedom and Democratic Party, several independent research groups and a number of groups that plan to publish their own magazines. Even within the front an insurgent group has set up a U.S. branch office in California to challenge the headquarters in Paris.

For the dissident movement to survive and not be seen as the tool of the K.M.T., it must deal seriously with the issues of democracy and corruption. For these are precisely the areas where the Chinese Communist Party has failed. It had an impressive history of mobilizing the Chinese people against feudal and colonial oppression and for the reconstruction of the country. But the party's pursuit of total control destroyed all independent initiatives and any trace of a "civil society," resulting in a system without checks on its own power and corruption. The party has become moribund, unable to manage the economy or maintain popular support, holding on to power only through brute force.

The recent developments in Eastern Europe have generated intense debates among overseas Chinese. The political transformation taking place there, and now in the Soviet Union, has shown that a monolithic Communist system may be capable of changing in a pluralistic and democratic direction. China's challenge is to develop its own brand of democratic socialism—a third option, distinct from Western capitalism or the bureaucratic socialism China has had for the past forty years. But if the Chinese dissident movement becomes financially dependent on Taiwan and allows money to color its much-needed political discussions, its vision will of necessity remain limited. And that would be a grave disservice to the nascent Chinese democracy movement. □

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# BOOKS & THE ARTS.

## Something Amis

GEORGE PACKER

LONDON FIELDS. *By Martin Amis. Harmony Books. 470 pp. $19.95.*

There are (at least) two kinds of satirist: the kind you can detect squatting at a moral distance from his or her object, gloomily mumbling dissent; and the kind who is indistinguishable from the pleasure of the farce, who loves the satire more than hates its object, and can posit no world outside the satire. Who doesn't seem to *want* a world outside it. Martin Amis is unquestionably the second kind, and this has important consequences for his new novel, some good, some not. Although not a line of *London Fields* conveys genuine sadness or genuine anger, the experience of reading this massive, oddly weightless novel can be exhilarating. A vision of tawdry apocalypse set in London 1999, it won't depress you—it might even cheer you up. It has vitality without feeling, like a long quaff of some explosive brew that leaves you stone sober.

All the ready-made adjectives are true: Amis is savage, hilarious, vulgar, virtuosic, brilliant, dazzling, merciless. In *Money*, his last novel, a character named Martin Amis says of this lack of mercy:

> The distance between author and narrator corresponds to the degree to which the author finds the narrator wicked, deluded, pitiful or ridiculous. . . . The further down the scale he is, the more liberties you can take with him. You can do what the hell you like to him, really. This creates an appetite for punishment. The author is not free of sadistic impulses.

The unmentioned irony here is that this authorial distance, because of the freedom and cruelty it allows, collapses over the course of a novel. When the appetite for punishment gets too sharp, the boundlessly clever and inventive author ends up wallowing in the same muck as his narrator. The grotesques of Amis's early books slide on the word "fuck" down into the swamp of lust and raunch and greed where you find *Money*'s antihero, John Self. These characters aren't psychological studies in deterioration; they aren't really characters at all. They're bound to act selfishly, viciously, luxuriantly, because that's the nature of their author's universe. "As a controlling force in human affairs," says "Martin Amis" in *Money*, "motivation is pretty well shagged out by now." He foresaw ubiquitous corruption and decay well before the era of Reagan and Thatcher made them impossible to miss; then it took the second type of satirist to rise (or sink) to the vigorous squalor of the 1980s. Amis seems better suited than anyone else to draw a bead on the past decade—extreme enough in his gifts and risks to render its extremity.

But perhaps Amis felt that being a satirist wasn't enough, for somewhere along the line he discovered nuclear weapons and got serious. He produced a collection of stories called *Einstein's Monsters* and announced in an introductory essay: "In a sense I had been writing about them all along. Our time is different. All times are different, but our time is *different*. A new fall, an infinite fall, underlies the usual—indeed, traditional—presentiments of decline." In other words, Amis's maniacally raucous farces had been shouting in the silence left by Hiroshima. Suddenly, he had struck motivation. Or, as a character in one of the nuclear stories says, "We endure the suicide's shame, the shame of the murderer, the shame of the victim. Death is all we have in common. And what does that do to life?"

Which brings us to *London Fields*. It is, as usual, about moral decay; but the setting now is the end of the millennium, under the shadow of the bomb, the total eclipse of a low-lying sun, planetary morbidity, a vague but chronic Crisis, and the drastic consequences of these for the human soul. "Hard to love, when you're bracing yourself for impact. And maybe love can't bear it either, and flees all planets when they reach this condition, when they get to the end of their twentieth centuries."

What drives this story are linguistic energy and a million funny, horrible, unerring details. The plot is simple, threadbare. A woman named Nicola Six, an entirely sexual and heartless creature who has the gift of premonition, walks into a pub called the Black Cross and foresees her own murder. She knows it will be someone on the premises, picks out two potential murderers and hatches a scheme of temptation and deception to punish them in advance for what they might do to her. The novel's 470 pages slowly unravel the murderee's anticipatory revenge, leading up to the eclipse, the night of her birthday and her death.

One of her suspects is Keith Talent, a lowlife cheat who keeps a multiracial stable of mistresses, a darts champion whose greatest ambition is to appear on TV. His lingo alternates between sports commentary and working-class brevity (sentences end with "innit?"). The other suspect is Guy Clinch, Keith's opposite: rich and chivalrous, gullible to a masochistic extreme. Guy has a chilly wife named Hope and a monstrous baby, Marmaduke, who bruises scores of nannies, assaults his father's genitals and defecates in astonishing volume—a terrifying antibaby for a baby-smitten era. Nicola's "project" takes place on these two broad fronts: Guy's "archaic heart" and Keith's "reptile modernity" (these qualities are asserted from the outset, cartoonlike). Remarkably little happens in what must be the most monumental cock-tease in modern literature. Nicola preys on the lust and weakness of both men, and then ruins both.

Of the two, the decent Guy is easily the more contemptible. Keith has the virtue of energy, at least, and Amis does a wonderful job of imagining his scams and appetites. Amis's world, one feels, belongs to the Keiths. Yet London in the last year of the century has left even Keith a bit outgunned.

> No one seemed to have thought through the implications of a world in which *everyone* cheated. The other morning Keith had bought five hundred vanity sachets of Outrage, his staple perfume. At lunchtime he discovered that they all contained water, a substance not much less expensive than Outrage, but harder to sell. Keith was relieved that he had already unloaded half the consignment on Damian Noble in the Portobello Road. Then he held Damian's tenners up to the light: they were crude forgeries. He passed on the notes without much trouble, in return for twenty-four bottles of vodka which, it turned out, contained a misty, faintly scented liquid. Outrage!

A world in which everyone cheats is a world in which Amis the novelist flour-

*George Packer is the author of* The Village of Waiting *(Vintage).*

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ishes. It's hard to imagine him happy in a London purged of corruption.

As in his novel of a dozen years ago, *Success*, Amis covers events several times over through radically different but limited points of view, a technique that affords much humor but also slows the narrative. And then there are the long interpolations of Samson Young, an American writer renting the flat of an English writer whose initials happen to be "M.A." Young, acquainted with all three of the book's other protagonists, is writing the story down as it unfolds, in the interests of money and literary reputation. He is also dying of a disease obscurely related to the global disintegration. The chapter-ending sections in which he interrupts his narrative are full of sly winks ("Man, am I a reliable narrator"), disingenuous disavowals, coy foreshadowings and insider references. Amis's inability to resist his own cleverness wears down one's endurance; he could have shortened the book 150 pages for the better if he'd done without the reflexive trickery.

Of all the characters, Nicola carries the most symbolic weight. She is not merely an affectless vamp; she is "the death of love": "And if love was dead or gone then the self was just self, and had nothing to do all day but work on sex. Oh, and hate. And death." Even more: She is "a black hole," with two imaginary friends called Enola Gay and Little Boy (the leitmotif again). Near the end of *London Fields*, Amis spells out the connection between the erotic murder-mystery and the fin-de-millennium big picture:

> I identify with the planet, thought Nicola, with a nod, as she started getting dressed. I know just how it feels. They say that everything wants to persist in its being. You know: even sand wants to go on being sand. I don't believe that. Some things want to live, and some things don't. As she clothed them she consulted her breasts, which told her that the big event wouldn't happen, and that the little one [her murder] would.

If, as the narrator announces at the outset, *London Fields* is not so much a whodunit as a "whydoit," the answer seems to be: the Bomb.

This strikes me as the high-mindedness of a misanthrope. It isn't convincing either as motivation or as a symbolic device; it's a leap from the muck to the abstract ozone, bypassing the terra firma of human sympathy (where Amis's talent could not flourish). Our time may be different but it's not *that* different. Modern people aren't corrupt because of nuclear weapons; corruption occurs for the same reasons it did fifty years ago, or two hundred. Martin Amis would have written satires in any age, and his don't need explanations—they need room to blow the vulgar vitality of that bit of truth they've swallowed and digested.

For the American reader, *London Fields* has enough of that vitality to cause wonder at what's become of this country's famous literary energy. To his credit, Amis doesn't despise America. (English novelists since Dickens have taken aim at this gargantuan target, and mostly missed.) Loving the satire, he also feels confident enough of his own powers to enjoy American excess. And in recent work, including *London Fields*, he's often nodded toward Saul Bellow as an American godfather. But Bellow, whose verbal energy and mastery of the intelligent antic voice make him a natural influence, is Amis with soul: less cutting and more humane. And for that reason, Bellow has gone sour as America—especially its cities, his home turf—has deteriorated.

America now has no one who can lay claim to the moral authority of the first kind of satirist. And as for the second kind, celebrity novelists clustered in New York are so much a part of money, success and the rest that they are pretty well shagged out by now. Martin Amis's brand of satire is out of their reach; our satirists *are* John Self, Nicola Six, Keith Talent. □

# How George Did It

RICHARD LINGEMAN

THE MAKING OF THE PREFIDENT 1789: The Unauthorized Campaign Biography. *By Marvin Kitman. Harper & Row. 358 pp. $22.50.*

Politicians' books have become objects of suspicion ever since former Speaker of the House Jim Wright's sensitive collection of writings was trashed by the philistines on the House Ethics Committee. Representative Newt Gingrich also was accused of accepting improper subsidies for a book. Eventually, attention is likely to turn to Marvin Kitman's *Making of the Prefident 1789*, and in the ensuing publicity, my connection with him will be raked over in the press. I have decided that my best strategy is the early hangout route.

I want to make it perfectly clear that although I was once Marvin Kitman's ghostwriter, I did not write this book. I only helped edit it, as the Acknowledgments attest. I have no financial interest in it, except normal writer's envy. Even so, there are probably narrow-minded people who are saying I shouldn't be reviewing it, that I am prejudiced. But my intention is not to engage in literary logrolling. I am trying to clear my name. Now that Peggy Noonan's book, *What I Saw at the Revolution*, is a best seller, ghostwriters are in the public eye and suspicion will inevitably fall on me. So let me state categorically that only Marvin Kitman could have written *The Making of the Prefident 1789*, and he did so out of personal motives of jealousy of a great American, George Washington.

You are probably wondering how I got into this mess. I was young and idealistic when I joined the Kitman presidential campaign team in 1964. At the time I was working for a magazine of political satire called *Monocle*, co-founded by Victor Navasky. I shall not relate the history of *Monocle* here; suffice it to say that it is the usual story of brutality, cupidity and lust. Wait for the movie.

Late in 1963, the magazine's prospects looked rather anemic. Our special issue on the Central Intelligence Agency, which included a comic strip on the assassination of a President, had hit the stands two days before John F. Kennedy was shot. This taught us a lesson about the importance of timing in humor. The upshot was that thousands of copies of the issue languished in a publisher's warehouse. We needed a circulation booster, and running a presidential candidate seemed a good way to regain our market share.

Being a satire magazine, we also thought it would be a good way to spoof the 1964 campaign—and the news media's candidate endorsement process as well. We had noticed that magazines either took no stand at all, for fear of offending some segment of their readership, or else they chose their endorsee from the roster of available politicians. They never picked the kind of person who reflected what *they* stood for as publications. If they did, *Playboy* would back a swinging bachelor like Warren Beatty, or (now that Hef has fallen) a swinging married man like Donald Trump. *Consumer Reports*

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would give its seal of approval to Ralph Nader, *Vanity Fair* would fawn over Ralph Lauren and the *National Enquirer* would dish the dirt about Roseanne Barr or, if it happened to be in a statesmanlike mood, Jackie O.

And so *Monocle* decided to be the first magazine to endorse a candidate tailored to its own image—indeed, it chose a member of its staff. Actually, Kitman, who had just turned 35, was the only one old enough to run for the presidency.

This is not the place to rehearse the history of the 1964 campaign. Suffice it to say Kitman lost. Since he has sequestered his notes and papers, I cannot reveal the inside story lest I be subjected to a lawsuit by his publisher, Harper & Row, which has a history of suing *The Nation* over presidential memoirs (see *Harper & Row Publishers Inc. v. Nation Enterprises*, re Gerald Ford). It is a matter of public record, though, that Kitman, a registered Republican, ran in the G.O.P. primary, and his main opponent was Senator Barry Goldwater. Branding Goldwater a "McKinley Republican," Kitman positioned himself as the most reactionary candidate in the race, a "real Lincoln Republican." He stood squarely on the 1864 G.O.P. platform, which called for freeing the slaves and bringing the South back into the Union. This radical civil rights stance cost him the white vote in the South, not to mention the rest of the country.

However, Kitman got off to a good start in the New Hampshire primary, garnering 638 votes. His large write-in vote was attributed to his appeal to the New Hampshire writers' bloc. He had pandered to this special-interest group with his campaign slogan, "I'd rather be President than write." At any rate, his early success fueled his grandiose dreams of moving on up to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

With such high-flown ambitions, his subsequent landslide defeat was a painful psychological blow. A psychohistorian might well trace his subsequent obsession with George Washington to the humiliating 1964 loss. In *The Making of the Prefident 1789* he confesses, "After my bitter defeat, I returned to my practice as a writer. But I would never be the same. Once you run for prefident [he uses the eighteenth-century spelling throughout] all other jobs seem second best. (Well, maybe not the vice-prefidency.)"

Although he went on to work as a television critic at *Newsday* (where he continues to hold forth today), Kitman sought the consolations of scholarship and began haunting the library, trying to discover where he had gone wrong. Eventually his researches led him to George Washington's 1789 campaign. This was a revelation. Washington turned out to be the most successful politician in our nation's history. He ran unopposed, got 100 percent of the electoral vote and could have been king if he wanted. In other words, he was the perfect role model for a presidential candidate.

There were more revelations to come. Ultimately, Kitman concluded that, contrary to myth, Washington was a consummate politician who had started campaigning in the summer of 1775 at the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia. The proof? Every day George donned his red and blue uniform, which had been in mothballs since the French and Indian War. Because of his military bearing, plus his carefully leaked promise to raise 1,000 men for the anti-British cause, he was elected general of the revolutionary armies. Thus he was on his way to acquiring an indispensable political asset: a war record. No matter, Kitman says, that his was America two, Britain nine; he was able to answer the bell

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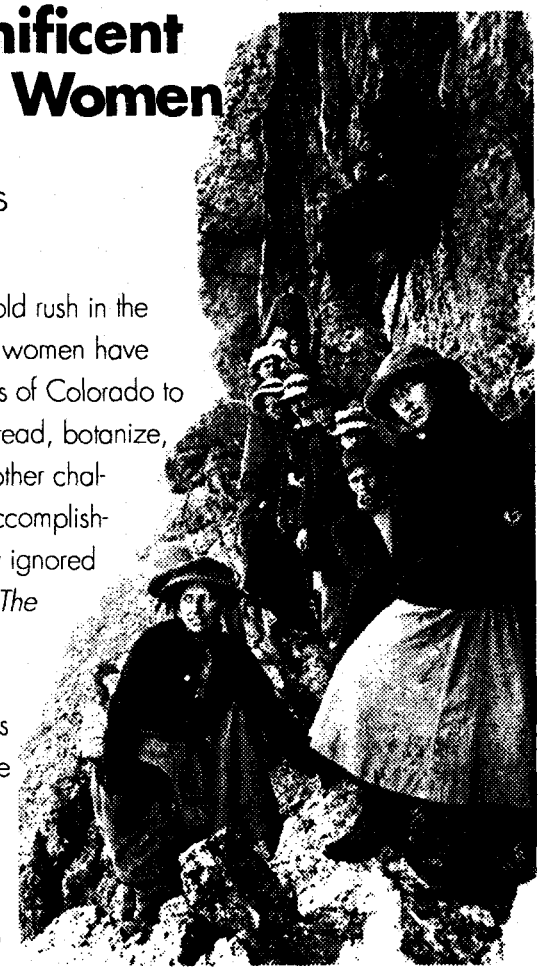

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for the fifteenth round at Yorktown. That victory made him an instant hero—indeed, a demigod.

When the author takes his little hatchet to Washington, some of the marble flakes away. Kitman exposes the general's blunders as a military tactician; he points out Washington's love for Madeira and his penchant for fox hunting, high-stakes whist and ballroom dancing; he conjectures about the women in Washington's life—the "Founding Girlfriends"—led by Kitty Greene, wife of Gen. Nathanael Greene and later fingered in goffip columns as the bedmate of Gen. (Mad) Anthony Wayne, the Marquis de Lafayette and Eli Whitney (I am not making this up; Kitman's scholarship is prodigious). Had Washington slept there too? Probably, Kitman says, although the failure of the opposition in 1789 to bring up the "woman issue" has insured that the answers will never be known. Certainly he saw little of his wife, Martha, during his seven years retreating with his army. Martha was, of course, the former filthy-rich widow Custis, but Kitman lays to rest the rumor that George married her for her money: "There was also her land, slaves and Bank of England stock." With Martha's ample dowry at his disposal, George had the means and leisure to pursue a political career.

Washington scholars will undoubtedly condemn this book as lèse-majesté, or else ignore it, hoping it will go away, as did James Flexner, author of the standard four-volume life of Washington, in a recent article on the first President in *American Heritage*. Students of presidential character, however, will find Kitman's scholarship a gold mine of insights, not only into Washington but into the author. A more obvious act of literary parricide would be hard to find. Freud said every boy must symbolically kill his father in order to be an autonomous individual. Kitman aims higher than that: He's out to bump off the Father of His Country. Thus the book may be interpreted as a necessary psychological step on Kitman's comeback trail. Our only hope of forestalling a rerun of his 1964 debacle is to buy thousands of copies and make Kitman a rich and successful author. Perhaps literary fame will divert him from his unswerving course. As his ex-ghostwriter, I have already crafted his Sherman statement: "Let George do it." □

# The Glory of Love

SARAH STAGE

SEARCHING THE HEART: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America. *By Karen Lystra. Oxford University Press. 336 pp. $24.95.*

Historians, who make it their business to read other people's mail, have largely ignored love letters. In *Searching the Heart*, Karen Lystra examines the love letters of more than a hundred men and women and finds those letters a rich source for understanding the private/public dichotomy at the heart of middle-class Victorian culture. Lystra's engaging study adds to the literature that rejects the old stereotype of Victorian sexual repression and moves beyond it to advance the more provocative and more problematic argument that women gained power, standing and status through romantic love.

The erotic intensity of the letters may surprise those who still mistake Victorian prudery for lack of passion. In 1867 a Yale graduate penned an apostrophe to his fiancée's breasts ("How they redden and tremble and swell/When a lover's warm lips/Are pressing their tips"), which testifies to the freedoms allowed in the privacy of the Victorian parlor. Nor were the women any less forward. "I like you to want me, dear," wrote a wife to her absent husband in 1883, "and if I were only with you, I would embrace more than the back of your neck, be sure."

Only the most outspoken and advanced women, like Emma Goldman, championed sexuality in public. But in private, respectable women and men celebrated sensuality. The letters of Clara Baker, an upstanding Victorian clubwoman, written to Robert Burdette before their marriage in 1899, frankly detail their physical intimacy without a trace of guilt. Burdette, a Baptist minister who condemned card playing and lectured young men on purity, wrote letters so torrid Clara cautioned him to confine his erotic imagery to separate pages so she could more easily destroy his "delicious" fancies, presumably after she had enjoyed them in private. Robert's love letters,

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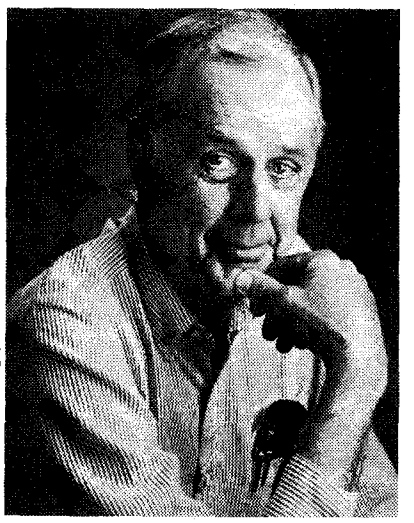
which often ran to more than twenty pages, defied censorship and have survived as a telling counterpoint to the couple's public image as pillars of Victorian rectitude.

More than hypocrisy is at work here. Lystra reconciles the Victorian public life of sexual condemnation with the private reality of sexual enthusiasm by demonstrating that for middle-class couples purity was not contingent upon frigidity, but rather upon privacy. It is precisely this Victorian obsession with privacy that has led to so much misunderstanding in the late twentieth century, when the division between public and private has all but collapsed and too great a divergence smacks of hypocrisy and deception. Not so in the nineteenth century, when the distinction between what could and could not be said and done in public defined the very essence of middle-class gentility.

Romantic love in Victorian America was, in Lystra's definition, "a complex alignment of idea, behavior, and emotion," grounded in the ideal of an essential self and closely allied to the cultural and social divide separating public and private expression. The conventions of romantic love encouraged men and women to abandon restraints and be their "natural and true" selves. This notion of a romantic self strengthened American individualism and at the same time served to legitimize sexual expression and contributed to the displacement of God. In the shift from a God-centered to a person-centered universe, nineteenth-century romantic love appropriated the symbols of religious life—the sacred vows, the holy kisses, the devoted couple—until sexuality itself became infused with religious significance.

The power of love in the area of gender relations is more problematic. Did romantic love empower women in any real way? Here Lystra stretches her evidence too far. She contends that "by bridging the gender gap and encouraging men's empathy in women's lives, romantic love weakened certain aspects of patriarchal family relations." In an era when middle-class women enjoyed little economic power, romantic love, not sex, Lystra insists, gave women some advantage. They used their power in courtship to test their lovers, setting up hurdles and precipitating crises only the most ardent suitor could overcome. The vain and spoiled Violet Blair, whose family owned Blair House in Washington, challenged her lover with a series of tests that would have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daunted even the most dogged beau. ("I will never be satisfied until you have won a case in the Supreme Court," she wrote her fiancé.) Women were keenly aware of their multilayered dependence on their potential husbands and recognized the deadly earnest nature of courtship. If they sometimes seemed genuinely reluctant to go to the altar, it was precisely because they recognized the transient nature of the "power" romantic love conferred. As Lystra herself concedes, "There was obviously room for considerable slippage between the intentions of courtship and the reality of marriage."

Lystra is more successful in challenging the belief that the separate spheres in the nineteenth century led to a separate female culture in which women formed more significant emotional bonds with other women than with men. Her careful reading of the love letters of middle-class women and men challenges this too-rigid view of separate spheres and undercuts the contention that the distance between the sexes in Victorian America amounted to emotional segregation. The letters reveal a world where sex roles were not circumscribed but fluid, where men and women, stimulated by romantic love to identify with the beloved, attempted to cross gender barriers emotionally if not in action. *Searching the Heart*, by bringing men into the picture and by focusing on relationships, points to the mistake of studying gender and the family in the context of women's lives only and adds an important new dimension to our understanding of middle-class Victorian mores. □

# The Rites of Man

MICHAEL S. KIMMEL

CONSTRUCTING BROTHERHOOD: Class, Gender and Fraternalism. *By Mary Ann Clawson. Princeton University Press. 270 pp. $27.50.*

Although in our time fraternal orders don't get much respect (think of Ralph Kramden and Ed Norton tromping off to the Loyal Order of Raccoons Lodge), they were serious business in the second half of the nineteenth century. Writing in the *North American Review* in 1897, W.S. Harwood calculated that fraternal orders boasted 5.5 million members out of a total adult male population of roughly 19 million. Why did so many American men join fraternal orders? What were they looking for and what did they find? And what should we postmoderns make of a bunch of small-town salesmen with painted faces and loincloths dancing ceremoniously around a bonfire?

According to Mary Ann Clawson in *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender and Fraternalism*, the answers lie in the vortex of class, race and gender in the history of American capitalism. Clawson takes fraternal orders to be windows into the hidden recesses of the American white male psyche; peeking through, she sees a contested terrain, plagued by self-doubts and the terror of humiliation.

In a sense, studies of fraternal orders at the turn of the century are the flip side of recent feminist inquiries into what Carroll Smith-Rosenberg called the "female world of love and ritual"—that elaborate culture women created to cope with the isolation and oppression engendered by the separation of spheres. If that separation isolated women in the home, it also exiled men from domestic life. Fraternal orders were, in part, men's effort to re-create a domestic sanctuary where they might experience fellowship without the "feminizing" influence of women.

Late-nineteenth-century capitalism meant rapid social mobility, economic instability, urban anonymity, aggressive individualism—the marketplace was a "site of humiliation," as Thoreau called it earlier in the century. And within the lodges, middle-class men found refuge, a self-consciously male "haven in a heartless world." One Pythian address captures this eloquently: "The wealth and pleasure of the outside world are but tinsel when compared with the pure gold of brotherly love."

The business of this brotherhood consisted of participation in civic and charity events as well as developing rudimentary life insurance and funeral schemes to benefit the members. But the most common activity was initiation; some orders had upward of thirty different ranks. Nearly all initiation rituals were modeled on baptism—the symbolic death of the old profane man and

*Michael S. Kimmel, a sociologist at the State University of New York, Stony Brook, teaches courses on gender and sexuality. His most recent book is* Men Confront Pornography *(Crown).*

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his rebirth into the community of believers, a new family. It also seems theoretically plausible to me that these men were more interested in mothering than fathering, and that initiation rituals were a way for men to appropriate women's reproductive capacity. Within the fraternal lodges, week after week, groups of men were symbolically giving birth to one another. If women now controlled the sphere of reproduction, they seemed to say, men could reinvent that sphere in a private men-only club. The fraternal order reinvented the family, as the band of brothers replaced mother as the center of men's lives. (This at the same moment that male obstetricians and gynecologists were inventing their medical specialty by pathologizing pregnancy and childbirth.)

Clawson makes no such theoretical leap. For her, the profound internal fraternal equality is an instrument the better to reproduce the outside world's traditional social hierarchies. And she is certain that the exclusion of women was central to the effort to re-create masculinity. So contemporary feminist observers saw it; the real purpose of fraternal orders, according to suffragist Matilda Joslyn Gage in the late nineteenth century, was to "set one sex against another," to exaggerate the differences between women and men and minimize the differences among men. In the decades following the Civil War (recall that the war's ruling metaphor was fratricide), fraternal rituals provided a means by which the rift could be healed and men could become brothers again.

But it was an extremely politicized brotherhood. On the one hand, fraternal orders offered a critique of late-nineteenth-century capitalism. Central to fraternal orders was the idealization of an artisanal masculinity that was gradually disappearing in the wake of the factory system. What men lost in the sphere of production they reinvented in the leisure realm of consumption. On the other hand, the artisanal hero celebrated in fraternal orders was "based as much upon a process of exclusion as it was upon a ritual of unification," Clawson writes. To her, this was a defensive reactionary effort to reconstitute the power of white, middle-class, native-born American men against all challengers: new European immigrants, the industrial working class, post-bellum blacks migrating to Northern and Midwestern cities, as well as uppity women who seemed to be taking over the private realm as well as demanding entry into the public realm.

The decline of fraternal orders into civic charity groups or pathetic caricature in the decades after 1920 was due, Clawson argues, to the partial success of those groups that the fraternal orders excluded. Women, blacks, immigrants and the working class were politically enfranchised and incorporated, at least nominally, into the public arena of American life. In addition, the appearance of places where men and women could socialize together lessened the appeal of all-male, cross-class institutions. Like their collegiate counterparts and contemporary men's retreats, late-nineteenth-century fraternal orders were a defensive effort to maintain clan, race and gender privilege. A reactionary brotherhood, the *egalité* contained within their version of *fraternité* extended to none but themselves. □

# ART.

ARTHUR C. DANTO

**Furniture as Art**

Botticelli's *Primavera*, which condenses in sweet allegories the longings and the learnings of its age, would turn up on everyone's short list of Quattrocento masterpieces. So it is instructive that it evidently spent its first years adjoined to an elaborate settle, or *lettuccio*, in an alcove adjoining the bedchamber of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco in Florence, and that, in the view of current scholarship, settle and painting were designed together as parts of a single ensemble. Indeed, Ronald Lightbown, an expert on Botticelli, writes: "The fact that the *Primavera* was intended to be hung or fixed above a piece of furniture at or slightly above eye level explains the gently rising plane on which the figures are distributed." Strictly speaking, then, we are looking at a fragment when we contemplate this gentle embellishment alone, in which the spring zephyrs of the Renaissance innocently stir. The fact that Lightbown refers to the other fragment as "a piece of furniture" testifies to a deep prejudice, long at work in our culture, in which art belongs on the other side of a line separating it from items of mere utility, as if the boundary between the bottom edge of *Primavera* and the upper edge of the *lettuccio*'s cornice were the metaphysical boundary that divides spirit from crass body—as if, indeed, *lettuccio* and paint-

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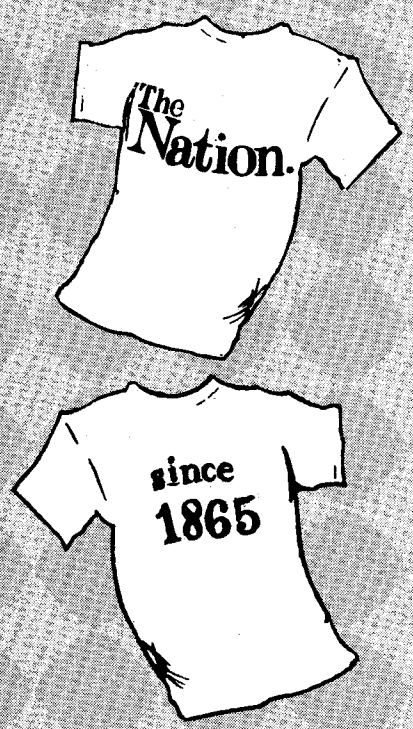


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ing together compose a kind of monster, like the centaur, half beast and half human, that Botticelli painted with such compassion for that same Florentine chamber.

Nothing could better demonstrate the conceptual distance at which we stand from the Quattrocento than our insistence on a borderline that artists and patrons in the Renaissance never thought to draw. In the larger scheme of life, after all, nothing could have been more overpoweringly utilitarian in that era than the altar of a church. And since the altarpiece was standardly conceived in terms of the practicalities of prayer and in the hope of holy intervention, something has been irremediably lost, even from the perspective of formalist aesthetics (like accounting for the "gently rising" ground plane of *Primavera*), when we remove the altarpiece to the museum as an object of disinterested contemplation. Aesthetics was a late-eighteenth-century invention: In the Renaissance, and long after, the beautiful and the practical were as much an undifferentiated unity as are, in philosophical truth, the body and mind.

My sense is that we owe the invidious distinction between the fine and the (merely) decorative arts, as we do so many divisions both hidden and obvious that define our attitudes toward the things of life, to the French Revolution. It was Jacques-Louis David, functioning as artistic commissar, who decreed the division, classifying furniture-making as an inferior art in contrast with the high arts of painting, sculpture and architecture. He did so on two grounds. That order of furniture which might compete with painting in terms of skill, ingenuity, expressive power and beauty he associated with the discredited values of the *ancien régime*. This, if true, means that aristocratic patrons did not especially discriminate between painters and furniture-makers of the highest quality, and hence did not respect a boundary greatly attractive to David, which exalted artists as natural aristocrats, so to speak. Ironically, the values of the dispossessed nobility must then have anticipated the ones later endorsed by John Dewey and his mentor, Albert Barnes. They sought in their writings, and in the case of Barnes, in his strategies of exhibiting painting and sculpture in the same space as ornamental ironwork, to dissolve the distinction that David helped make canonical.

David's second ground of discrimination was that painting and sculpture were capable of serving the highest purpose of art as he conceived of it: namely, to give moral instruction to its viewers, making them better persons—and, incidentally, politically correct citizens—in consequence of their experiences in museums of art. His own paintings of the period were hortatory and edifying to a degree we find painful today. It is clear that David's second ground was somewhat weakened by his first: It was precisely because the bergères and fauteuils and elaborately worked ormolu fittings for escritoires and gaming tables imparted the wrong sort of moral teachings that David impugned them. It is at the same time perfectly evident that the style of furniture David would tolerate in spaces over which he exercised any control must transmit the same order of moral meaning as the kind of painting in which he believed. Furniture condenses the values and moral gradations of its owners, and can be as eloquent or as tendentious as sermons.

From the transformations in moral and political perspective of the 1880s, David came to be regarded as having been something of an aesthetic villain for having politicized the straight line when the *curved* line, which emblemized the rococo style, came to be esteemed as somehow essentially French. And in fact there was an intense effort to rehabilitate the rococo style not simply in terms of painting and decoration but in terms of the modes of moral meaning implied by the form of life for which the rococo stood. It followed as a matter of course that the Salon should open itself up to furniture-makers by 1890, and that the leading artists of the Belle Époque should express themselves in the design of dinnerware, textiles, stained glass, wall coverings and screens, not to mention graphic design. In the early modernist vision of Vuillard, Lautrec, Bonnard and above all Gauguin, decorativity came to be the defining category of aesthetics. That "decorative" has reverted to a term of critical abuse is evidence that we have returned to the Davidian program of art—minus, to be sure, the moral didacticism.

In the 1890s, the decorative arts generally went with an agenda of social transformation and an often utopian politics. Recently, when he was seeking a new sort of politically engaged conceptual art, Tim Rollins recalls coming to think, "The textile and wallpaper designs of William Morris and his workshop . . . pointed a way to reconsider the languages possible for a new political art—an art political not so much in its form or con-

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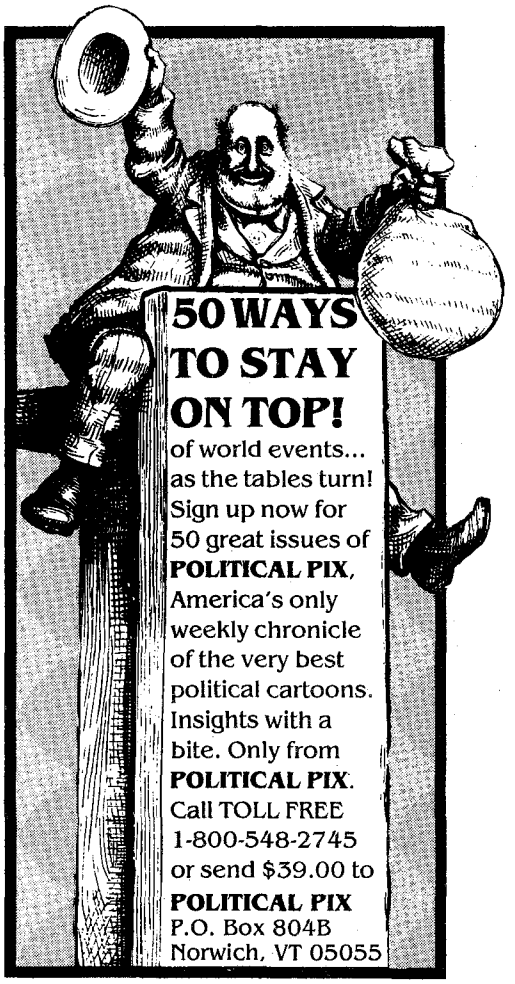
tent, but political in the very way it is made." If we think in this way of art as a "language," then it is irresistible to invoke the singular thesis of Ludwig Wittgenstein: "To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life." (Rollins goes on to suggest that "the greatest indictment of capitalism can be found in but a yard of Morris's perfect, beautiful materials.") In any case, by comparison with the great transformative visions of Art Nouveau in France, of *Jugendstil* in Germany and the Vienna Werkstätte—and of course Morris's Arts and Crafts movement in England—most explicitly political art has the dimension of cartoon. It was an early premise of the Museum of Modern Art in New York that the formalist aesthetic, as much embodied in articles of daily use as in modernist painting, should bit by bit transform the patterns of daily life and in consequence the moral character of those who lived those patterns. These attitudes weakened in the immediate postwar years. Artists turned from politics with a kind of loathing and heroized painting as a disengaged act of pure expression. But it was perhaps inevitable that by the late 1960s, there should be, as one aspect of the elimination of social divisions perceived as oppressive, an effort to erase the boundary between high and low art, or between the fine and the practical arts. It was part of the spirit of the times that furniture-makers should begin to claim that so far as artmaking was concerned, there was no conceptual distinction between what they did and what painters and sculptors did.

Until that demand for equal ontological rights, furniture-makers generally had been characterized by the essentialism that tended to mark the ideology of art in our century: to identify what it was that essentially sets furniture apart from everything else. Essentialism goes hand in conceptual hand with purism. Theorists of painting, for example, came to view picturing as not essential to their subject, and undertook in the spirit of pure painting to purge their art of pictorial content and the very space that made this possible, which meant that the truth in painting went with the absolute flatness and two-dimensionality of surfaces. Others came to identify painting with the very act of putting paint on, which then led to an aesthetic of the heavy brushstroke and ultimately the drip. Or painting became identified with the material basis of the art, which yielded paintings that drew attention to their own shape and that flaunted canvas and stretcher. When video art made its first tentative claims to aesthetic privilege, its makers looked spontaneously for what was essentially video, which then relegated everything else to the status of contaminant, and yielded the parameters of video criticism.

It was unavoidable that, when furniture-makers began to think of themselves as artists, their first effort was to essentialize their practice or their product, and various alternatives immediately suggested themselves. There was the mysticism of material, for example, the exaltation of the "woodiness" of wood, which impelled the entire art to celebrate and enhance grain, luster and, in radical cases, the natural shape of wood. And there was the parallel celebration of artisanship, in particular the virtuosity of joinery, of inlay, of veneer and of polish. There was even, at a certain stage in this itinerary of artistic self-definition, an effort to subtract what seemed to be that feature of furniture which keeps it from the precinct of high art—its utility—so that the furniture-maker who aspired to the higher calling might produce objects of beautiful material, exquisitely crafted, but almost flagrantly nonutilitarian, as with certain transitional works by Wendell Castle, who was among the first of those who wanted to be at once artists and furniture-makers.

There were other subtractions, once the movement was under way. Richard Artschwager, originally a furniture manufacturer, started to employ Formica, that most aesthetically despised of domestic substances, in a reaction against the effort to identify furniture, when art, with beautiful materials. Artschwager thus effected a double erasure: By dissolving the line between fine woods and plastic, he overcame in an eccentric way the line between furniture and fine art. But the gesture I find most admirable in this singular history is a subtraction of subtractions—a negation of negations—achieved with a cabinet made by a California *ébéniste*, Garry Knox Bennett. It is made of padouk (a Burmese rosewood), artfully joined, with a craftsmanlike finish and elegantly designed fittings. And when it was done, Bennett drove a bent 16p nail into the facade, surrounding it with a halo of dents of the kind hammers make in unskilled hands. This Rimbaud-like gesture ("One evening I sat Beauty on my knees. And I found her bitter. And I injured her") repudiates three decades of essentialist quest, and is itself the very essence of the postmodern spirit in art.



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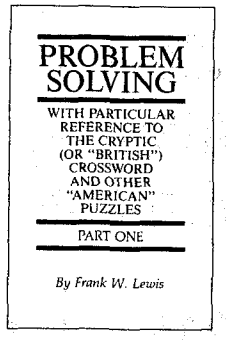
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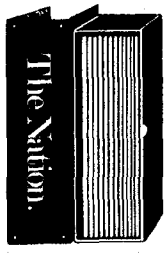


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What Bennett hammered home was the truth that art, whether in painting or in furniture, is a matter of meaning. And that extends to high craftsmanship and rare materials as well as to their subversion, such as in the work of Bennett and Artschwager. Furniture can be an art when it is about its own processes or its own substances or even its own functions, as Wendell Castle demonstrated, though by no means is its vocabulary of meanings restricted just to these.

A few years ago, the Architectural League of New York sponsored an exhibition of chairs, an open competition they called "The Chair Fair" in which 397 entries were displayed with marvelous fanfare and enthusiasm. I was invited to deliver a lecture as part of the celebration, and it was then that the rich symbolism of the chair in human life began to impress me. I spoke first of the chair *in* art—the empty throne in a Buddhist work from Amaravati, Van Gogh's portraits of himself and Gauguin as chairs, and Warhol's electric chairs, with which, characteristically insightful into the language of symbols, Warhol raised the question of what dignity we feel ourselves according to the victim when we execute him or her in the sitting posture (rather than lying down or standing up). And then I tried to raise what it means for a chair as such to be art, pointing out, as I went, the way different chairs imply different philosophies of life: the wing chair, the sling chair, the salon chair, the BarcaLounger, the chaise longue, not to mention the fact that the President sits in a desk chair while the Pope permits himself the palanquin, intolerable in a democracy. Erica Jong has the heroine of an earlier book complain when Leila, the heroine of her new book, lies weeping on the floor: "Couldn't she weep in a chair for once?" To which Leila responds, "Could you?" What is implied about the depths of sorrow that is inconsistent with its being expressed while sitting, requiring at least that one lie in bed or, even better, that one sob from the lowest position available, on the floor, kicking to get lower?

The twenty-six contemporary furniture artists who were invited by the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston to produce a "masterpiece" for inclusion in an exhibition titled "New American Furniture: The Second Generation of Studio Furnituremakers" are alive to the referential powers of furniture as a bearer of meaning, and it would be rare to find an exhibition of contemporary painting or sculpture as radiant with a collective intelligence, wit, knowledge, expressiveness, skill and beauty as this set of brilliantly conceived and executed objects. I was taken through the show by Edward S. Cooke Jr., who conceived and curated it. He opened doors and pulled out drawers with an infectious gusto, explaining a good many things that he had described in great detail in the accompanying catalogue. Each artist selected a piece of furniture from the past—a seventeenth-century trestle table, a New England trundle bed, a kneehole bureau table from about 1760, a Philadelphia high chest from about the same date and a wonderful chest by the American artist Charles Prendergast, which is a descendant of the *cassone* that formed part of Botticelli's *lettuccio*. Each then constructed a piece that expresses something of the spirit of the one to which it refers, but at the same time carries the quite different sort of meaning that a chest or a chair meant to be integrated into contemporary discourse must transmit.

The Prendergast chest was selected as a paradigm by Judy Kensley McKie, whose work makes a boisterous use of animal motifs as decorative components. She did a couch once with a back made of leopards, nose to nose, their tails coiling out to form its arms. She also made a jewelry cabinet with inlaid Keith Haring dogs. For this occasion she placed a chest on corbeled legs and entwined on all its surfaces (including the undersurface of its cover) gold-leaf leopards, grinning amid plant forms. It was Wendy Maruyama who deconstructed and reconstructed the Philadelphia high chest. The upper cabinet is topped by a copper-leaf pyramid and buttressed by what look like giant commas. The lower chest is set into four heavy mahogany legs, which seem to want to be streamlined, as if to dissociate themselves from the awkwardness of the body of the piece, which is painted a funky green, accented with pink slashes, and is ornamented with cigar-shaped pulls. With its copper helmet and its rolls of pulls like buttons on a uniform, it stands like some sort of sentinel, amusing and imposing, full of good will, making a point of being useful despite its crazy charm.

Garry Knox Bennett has confected what looks like a kneehole desk out of an improbable assortment of materials, including aluminum and brick. It is at once sinuous and ponderous and conveys the authoritativeness that the owner of a

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desk so heavy must possess, and at the same time it projects a certain unrepressed whimsy through its shape and color. It would be ideal for the C.E.O. of a joke factory. Tom Loeser has built a chest of drawers consisting only of drawers, which, as if having escaped the rigidities of a confining frame, are of different sizes, shapes and colors, and stagger upward as if piled one atop the other. But they open with that same assurance with which the door of a new car closes, revealing the craft that their staggered disorder seems to mock. By contrast, Hank Gilpin has constructed a wardrobe whose inspiration was a chaste paneled door from a house in Massachusetts, and door and wardrobe alike are exactly the kind of furniture David would have endorsed had he cared to revise his thesis that, unlike painting, furniture is morally mute. There is, by Thomas Hucker, a high chest of drawers that refers to a chest of the William and Mary style. Its polished mahogany facade curves outward like the side of a cylinder, and is placed against a less dramatically curved black back panel. Both upper components are poised in an elegant dignity upon six precisely turned legs. It conveys a very different code from that which can be read in Gilpin's austere and almost Puritan piece, which in turn repudiates the lighthearted values of Maruyama's punk and rowdy artifact, which keeps its good craftsmanly manners hidden.

Boston has been something of a center for studio furniture. A good many of the artists originally set up shop in the area, and there are several galleries showing their work. On the other hand, a considerable political distance has been traversed since the first workshops were set up in the 1960s, at a time when woodworking seemed, by its own nature, to make a kind of political statement and crafts communes were much the order of the day. The attitude was resolutely anti-elitist, and the earlier pieces doubtless reflected, in style and matter, the place that furniture as an expressive art was to play in the form of life that the craftspersons themselves believed in (as did so many in the communes that sprang up across the nation in those years). It is perfectly plain that whatever the politics of furniture-as-art were originally believed to be, the work in the Boston show hardly could be more elitist. This order of skill, working upon rare materials, cannot come cheap, any more than it came cheap in the days of du Barry and Madame Pompadour. And, like painting, furniture that is art is made possible by the existence of a set of connoisseurs and collectors. Making these chests and tables and desks is finally as exacting as making paintings, perhaps even more so, and it is an interesting question why they should cost so much less than paintings of comparable power do. Perhaps it is because we continue to carry a romantic prejudice in favor of expressive fervor—and there is no way in which a tortured furniture-maker can give vent to creative frenzy by impulsive dovetailing or expressive mortise-and-tenoning, the way the artistic Genius can wipe and swipe pigment, or her counterpart in sculpture hack away emotionally at stone or wood, or shape clay with fury and passion. The myths that support discriminating borderlines are tentacular. The contemporary world remains suspicious of skill and elegance in art.

The show closed in Boston on March 18, but the good news is that it will be at the Renwick Gallery of the National Museum of American Art in Washington from April 20 to September 3, and after that at the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati from November 9 to January 8, 1991. (There is no reason why it should not circulate further, so petition your local museum and see if you can't get it booked.) New Yorkers will be able to see an alternative version of the exhibition at the Franklin Parrasch Gallery at 584 Broadway. This will include pieces by Thomas Hucker and Garry Knox Bennett, as well as something by John Cederquist, whose brilliant *trompe l'oeil* appropriation of a Newport, Rhode Island, high chest was the hit of the Boston show. Titled *Le Fleuron Manquant* ("The Missing Finial"), it appears to be a three-dimensional collage of colonial furniture-making and packing cases with drawers, which it takes a certain enterprise to find but which, once found, open like silk. The show will be on from April 20 to May 26. □

# LETTERS.

(*Continued From Page 546*)

ESOPs, but let me declare myself an ardent supporter of both employee ownership and Rosen's efforts. What's more, I think ESOPs constitute an excellent defense against takeovers. Hostile takeover contests are generally bad for the economy and for workers. Of all the corporate defenses against this financial buccaneering, the ESOP is one of the few worthy weapons. *Bartlett Naylor*

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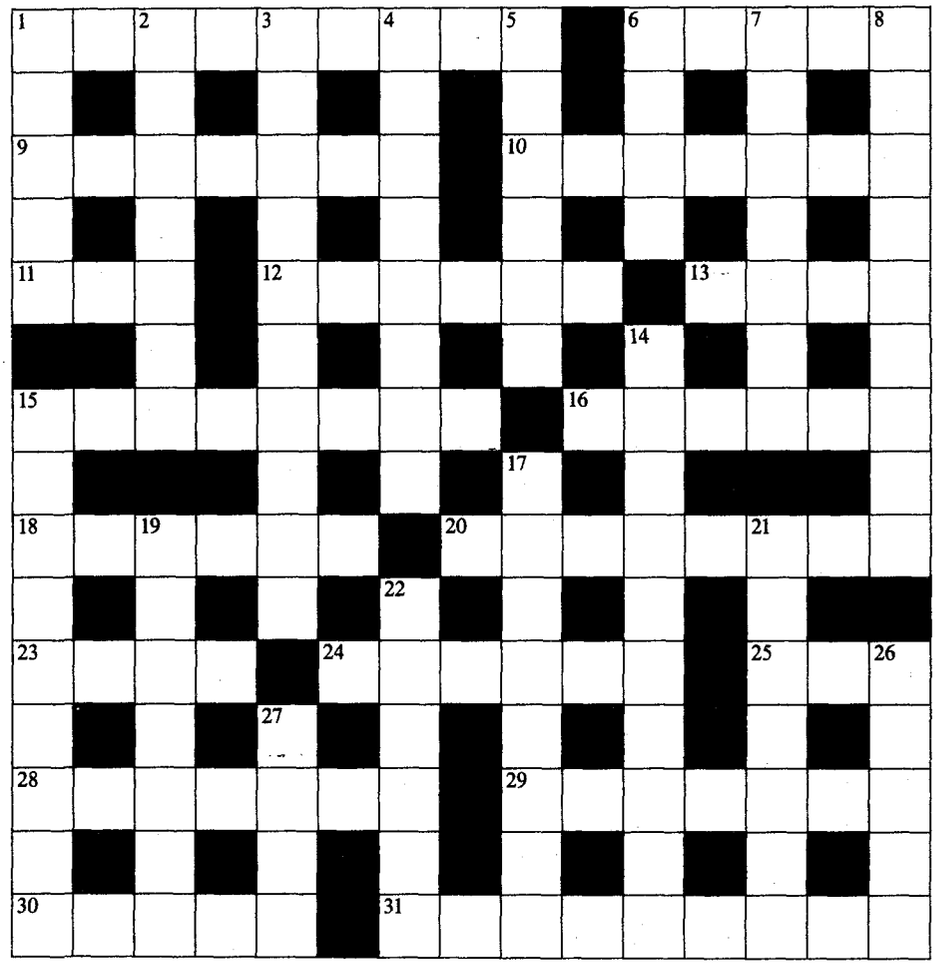
# Crossword Puzzle No. 2286

FRANK W. LEWIS



### ACROSS

1 Nonreturnable bottles? People are much more Crusoe-like! (9)
6 Possibly a standout feature with a country currently in the doghouse . . . (5)
9 . . . and a person animal lovers might not like . . . (7)
10 Sounds like where to look for apple juice for one who should know what's happening. (7)
11 and 12 . . . and a driver of ill repute in a smash play that goes on and on. (3-3-3)
13 Fish for a journeyman when this starts to enter. (4)
15 Very unattractive women, but a little public relations put on them goes ahead. (8)
16 and 18 See 24
20 Important parts of the old boat, deserving salutatory drinks around the evening hours. (8)
23 Diamond possibly associated with the land and glory? (4)
24, 25, 16 and 18 Coop suggesting a short form of what might follow this precept? (3,3,3,3,3,3,3)
28 Did they once act funny in court? (7)
29 Lost ground might be. (Does the untidy rip know scots?) (7)
30 One might for coffee—or one might make one for freedom. (5)
31 If you see that the instrumental group gets older, these could be equivalent. (9)

### DOWN

1 An impediment to progress, though one might do it to a 13. (5)
2 One in the pair that argues for what paint might do? (7)
3 Making the evaluation of a quiet commendation? (10)
4 Shortens something, like around a form of contract. (8)
5 Paradoxically, you might make one by falling down on the job. (4-2)
6 Scot free? Not if this is attached to it! (4)
7 Algonquin, for example, with a state of it? (7)
8 Literally a high point of Greek civilization. (9)
14 Makes a tuner seem what a teller does. (10)
15 Not working (but possibly moonlighting). (3,3,3)
17 Once free, possibly now tied up in a meeting. (8)
19 If someone makes a lunge at you, this could be your answer. (7)
21 Don't have enough Japanese money around? Loosen up! (7)
22 Brand-new sun due, possibly. (6)
26 and 27 An interminable oration in Colorado? (5,4)

SEE LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION AT LEFT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